PRS EXCLUSIVE!

Paul Reed Smith takes on the Telecaster with new electrics

WRECKING CREW

Session legend Carol Kaye on recording historic 1960s hits

NUNO'S RETURN

Extreme's guitar maven on what a great solo should be

Guitarist

Issue 500

AUGUST 2023

RORY GALLAGHER

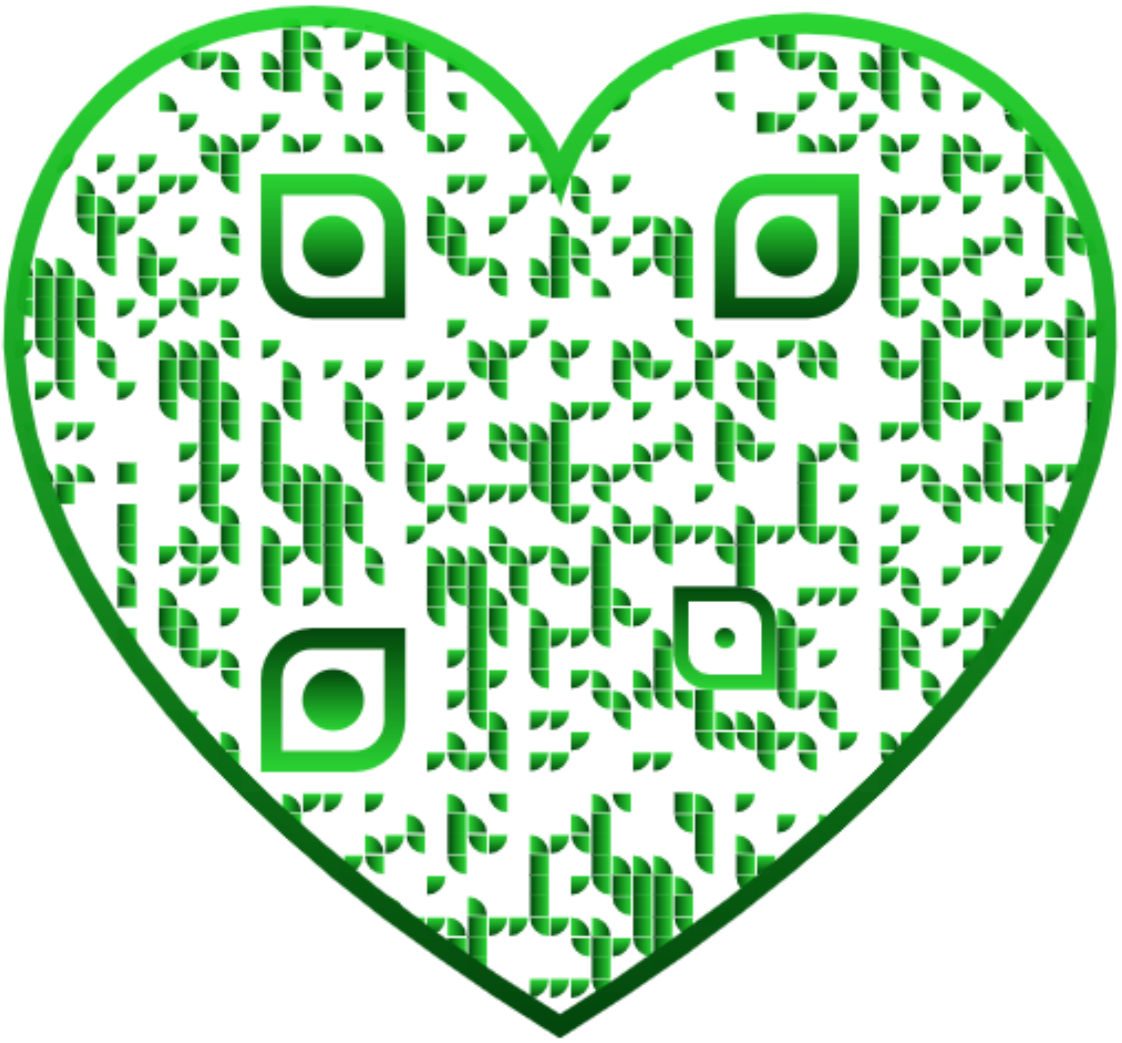
HANDS ON WITH THE RIGS HE PLAYED AT LEGENDARY GIGS

500TH ISSUE SPECIAL
GIFTS & GUITAR COMPETITION INSIDE

EXCLUSIVE!
VIDEO DEMOS OF RORY'S AMPS & FX!
Featuring gear used in classic TASTE and SOLO ALBUM gigs from 70s to 90s

PLUS
STEVE LUKATHER ON BUYING GUITARS
MARTIN SC-10E
PETE THORN

FUTURE



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Thank You...

Back in the early 90s I was hanging out in the garage of a friend, Dan Hawkins, and both of us were earnestly trying to come up with indie-inspired riffs. Nirvana was a new band then, just rising to fame, there were eggboxes on the garage wall and a Boss DS-1 on the floor. Every now and then, Dan's older brother Justin came in and played a hair-metal lick on his Jackson, which had a Kahler and a lone humbucker. We sighed and tried to carry on with our 'serious' guitar music.

I can't recall if there was an issue of *Guitarist* lying about, but there certainly was back home at my place. The mag had already being going for around a decade by that point and it was my bible – an indispensable map to this new world I'd already fallen in love with, from shred to shoegaze. 30 years or so have passed since then and now I'm editing the mag, while Justin and Dan have been in it many times thanks to their band that went on to make it big, The Darkness.

Lest the above sound self-congratulatory, the point I'd like to make is that being into guitar seemed like a terrific adventure even then, back when there were still eggboxes on the walls and, for Justin and Dan, playing arenas was just a dream. As *Guitarist* reaches its 500th issue, it's that thought that lingers: playing guitar is an adventure, no matter what stage you are at with it. The first time you open the box of a new guitar that you're unsure how to even play, it is an adventure. The first time you strum an E chord that rings out clearly, it is an adventure. And while having guitar heroes to look up to has always been part of the journey, guitar has never needed fame to be an adventure in and of itself.

So, on behalf of everyone at *Guitarist* and everyone who has worked on this magazine over the past 500 issues, thank you sincerely for making it all possible. Without you, dear reader, none of it would have happened. Guitar remains *our* great adventure, together. I hope the mag continues to be a worthy guide and companion on that lifelong road. Cheers!

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights

We've Had Issues...
Guitarist contributors old and new look back on the heights and occasional howlers of making 500 issues of this tome **p48**

Carole Kaye
A studio legend, her playing has graced thousands of hits, from Sinatra to Zappa. She tells us all about doing it her way on **p54**

Classic Rock Show
Pete Thorn and James Coles shared the secrets to nailing the tones of iconic hits on stage when we joined them on tour earlier this year **p74**

COVER IMAGES: COVER IMAGE BY OLLY CURTIS; CAROL KAYE PHOTO (AS ABOVE) BY GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES; NUNO BETTENCOURT PHOTO BY MARK HORTON/GETTY IMAGES; CLASSIC ROCK SHOW IMAGE (ABOVE) BY WILL IRELAND

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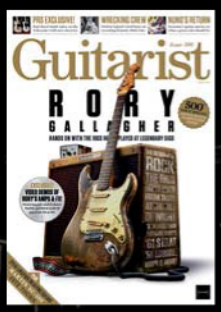

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY
Olly Curtis

COVER FEATURE

Rory Gallagher's Rigs

60 This issue, *Guitarist*'s photography studios had the great privilege of hosting Rory Gallagher's most historic gear. The late guitarist's nephew Daniel Gallagher joins us to talk through Rory's life on the road, as we assemble the exact rigs from his most famous live gigs

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music radar SCAN TO GET OUR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

Gifts this issue

ISSUE 500
AUGUST 2023

To celebrate our 500th issue, this edition contains some unique goodies, downloads and collectibles. Here's what you get, we hope you enjoy them!

Please note: physical gifts (coasters and poster) are only available on UK newsstands.

FOUR LUXURY COASTERS

Have a drink on us with four unique and collectible coasters featuring stunning images of vintage and classic guitars, including a 1950 Fender Broadcaster from the superb Seven Decades collection, a 1963 Lake Placid Blue Fender Strat that once belonged to Neville Marten, a beautiful Gibson Custom 1963 ES-335 reissue and Bernie Marsden's 1959 Les Paul Standard aka 'The Beast'. With commemorative 500th Issue logos on the reverse, these unique coasters are well worth raising a glass to.

DOUBLE-SIDED A2 POSTER

Decorate your home in style with our double-sided poster featuring Rory Gallagher's iconic 1961 Strat on one side and a very special PRS 2011 Collection Series II David Grissom DGT Custom 1, adorned with a magnificently figured quilt maple top and other embellishments.

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SEE PAGE 46 FOR DETAILS

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ISSUE 500
AUGUST 2023

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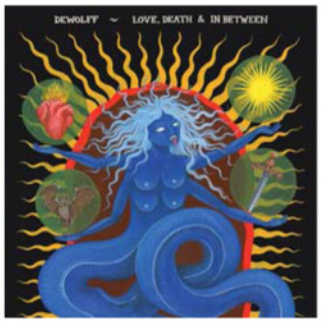
The Present Day
(*The Liberty Project*)



TRACK #4
DEWOLFF
Night Train
(*Love, Death & In Between*)

TRACK #5
STEVE LUKATHER
When I See You Again
(*Bridges*)

TRACK #6
JOE BONAMASSA
Notches (Live)
(*Tales Of Time*)

TRACK #7
CONNOR SELBY
I Shouldn't Care
(*Connor Selby*)

TRACK #8
STEVE VAI
She Saved My Life Tonight
(*Vai/Gash*)

TRACK #9
THE COLD STARES
Got No Right
(*Voices*)

TRACK #10
PAUL GILBERT
Man On The Silver Mountain
(*The Dio Album*)

TRACK #11
KRIS BARRAS BAND
Chaos
(*Death Valley Paradise*)

TRACK #12
CONQUER DIVIDE
welcome2paradise
(*Slow Burn*)

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- Mark Lettieri
PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS
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GIBSON BILLIE JOE ARMSTRONG LES PAUL JUNIOR
£2,199

WHAT IS IT? The latest signature for Green Day's frontman in vibrant style, with a new-design humbucking dog-ear pickup

Working Class Hero

Flag-waving Les Paul Junior lover Billie Joe Armstrong gets a new signature in typical showman style and with a fresh pickup design that dates back to the late 50s. Let's plug in!

Words David Burrluck **Photography** Neil Godwin

Can it really be 69 years ago that Gibson took the wraps off its bare-bones Les Paul Junior? Well, it is, and while it might have been aimed at students back in the day, you don't need us to tell you it's powered many classic recordings to which Green Day's Billie Joe Armstrong has certainly contributed. He's been a Gibson signature artist since 2006, his latest was back in 2018, and there's already an affordable Epiphone Billie Joe Armstrong Les Paul Junior.

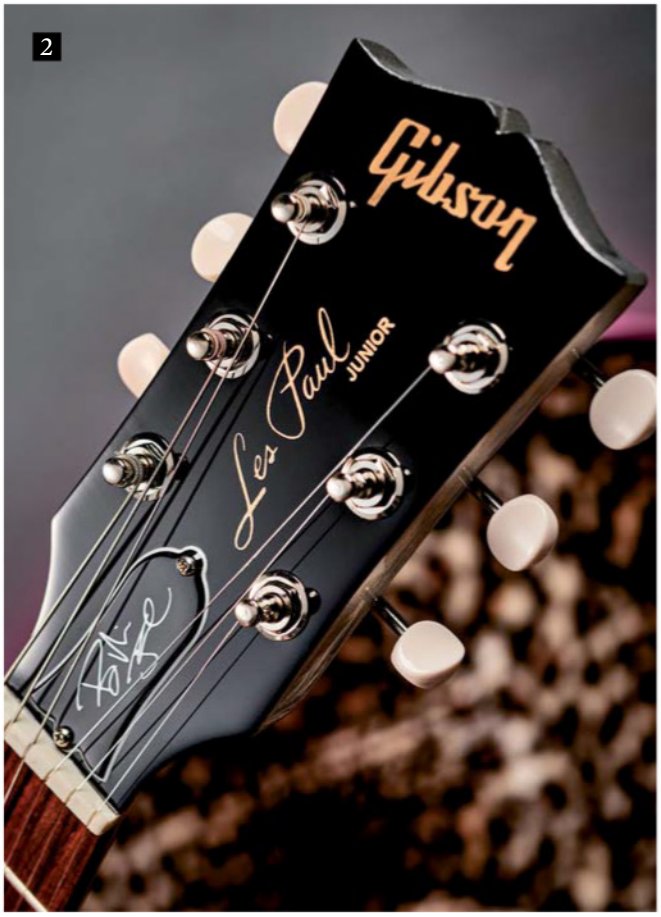
Billie's take for 2023 is as much a celebration of his style as it is a viable new addition to the oeuvre in its pink plastic Protector case with leopard print interior, a stock Vintage Ebony finish or this show-off Silver Mist metallic. The 2018 version used a standard '57 Classic zebra humbucker, and previous runs featured a stacked-coil P-90 design. Under the dog-ear cover of this latest signature is a new humbucker created by Gibson's Jim DeCola that's based on the 'sidewinder' style Gibson actually first used on the Seth Lover-redesigned EB-2 bass pickup back in 1958.

1. Junior's bright pink case and leopard print interior are bound to be a talking point among potential purchasers

Pickup and finish aside, this version also differs from the Original Series Junior with its 60s-style Billie Joe Armstrong SlimTaper neck profile, individual Gibson Deluxe tuners and large strap buttons.

Now, if you want a perfectly finished guitar, you might need to look elsewhere. Although the top clear coat is perfectly flat and glossed, you can see the grain of the mahogany in numerous places and a rather obvious tooling mark where the neck joins the body. As the neck is a full-width tenon, there's that body lip on the treble side that is much more square-edged than our '57 vintage reference.

This guitar is a perfect weight, light but not excessively so, and the neck feels bigger than its measurements suggest



2. Colour and case aside, the only signature emblem is the BJA scribble on the truss rod cover. Instead of the classic three-on-a-plate tuners, these are individual Gibson Deluxe with modern mountings

It's also not possible to confirm whether the 45mm thick slab body is one or multi-piece because the only wood we can see is the slightly orange-tinted rosewood fingerboard. The edges of the 'board are lightly rolled and the standard medium-gauge frets are cleanly installed, just lacking a final polish on their tops. The neck pitch is good, too, so the lightweight aluminium

UNDER THE HOOD

What's going on with this new hum-cancelling dog-ear pickup?

"The P-90 DC does have two smaller coils that are rotated 90 degrees sideways," Gibson's Jim DeCola explains. "Inside each coil is a rare earth magnet with like poles facing the centre row of pole screws. This magnetic orientation is just as a standard P-90 has, except that each magnet passes through each coil in order to achieve hum-cancelling operation. Seth Lover used this on the EB-0 and EB-2 basses debuting in the late 50s. At the time, due to the magnets used, he used two very large coils with a very high number of windings to achieve the desired output. However, it resulted in a very dark and fat tone."

It creates a wide magnetic field, which is noticeably stronger when compared with our '57 P-90. The high DCR of 16.6kohms suggests 43 [gauge] or smaller coil wire, which is confirmed by Jim, although he adds that "the higher DC resistance is not indicative of how 'hot' the pickup is because of the very different pickup design.

"This is really what Seth Lover was trying to achieve with the 'humbucker,'" he tells us. "In the classic humbucker configuration, each coil has an iron load sensing the strings, which resulted in the 'fatter' tone the humbucker is known for. The P-90 DC achieves the hum-cancelling operation yet still has a centre row of pole screws sensing the strings so it retains the classic P-90 'fat single coil' tone."

With the cover removed, we find two coils placed on their sides with a magnet running through both coils, all neatly potted and taped up

wraparound bridge sits low to the body, though it does tip forward a little. While the setup is fine, intonation with this simple bridge will never be 100 per cent, but it's certainly good enough for some rowdy rock 'n' roll.

Feel & Sounds

This one is a perfect weight, light but not excessively so, and thanks to the pretty full shoulders (which are fuller than our Les Paul Classic's standard SlimTaper), the neck feels bigger than the measurements suggest: 20.8mm deep at the 1st fret, 22.7mm by the 12th. Acoustically, there's an alive feeling, a crisp and ringing response.

The pickup sits pretty close to that bridge; it's 34mm from the domed top of the bridge to the centre of the high E polepiece, so 10mm closer than our '57. As supplied and with no overall height adjustment, the top of the dog-ear cover sits around 3mm from the strings on both sides (measured with the outer strings fretted at the 22nd fret), although you can, of course, adjust the slot-head polepieces to your taste. Our '57 model's dog-ear is almost too close to the strings by comparison, approximately 1.5mm on both sides.

But what we hear from this BJA isn't a million miles from our '57: it has slightly less output and less of the big lower

3. The pickup is placed close to the bridge, rather like on Billie's 1956 LP Junior named 'Floyd'. It was moved further away from the bridge in late 1956 presumably to reduce some of the single coil's brightness

4. The volume and tone control circuit is as simple as it gets, using a pair of Gibson logo'd pots with a nominal value of 500kohms and an .022µf Orange Drop capacitor, which is wired modern (not vintage) style

What we hear from this BJA isn't a million miles from our '57 vintage reference – it sounds a little clearer and a bit more polite

midrange, it sounds a little clearer and a bit more polite, and it's less raw. But turn up the wick and it's certainly got some balls, and it sounds and feels quite well behaved – more standard humbucking-like than our '57, which is both noisier and quite microphonic by comparison.

The tone control is certainly effective, and though the volume's taper is quite fast, many will just leave things full up. And that's where we hear maximum sizzle – pulling that volume back does round things but only very slightly.

Verdict

There's quite an upcharge for this package, so unless you want a vivid pink leopard print case, or indeed a Junior in metallic silver, you might want to go for the standard model in one of its two historic colours. While we did encounter a couple of visual defects here, this is a rather good example of this near 70-year-old guitar design with a great weight and a hum-cancelling dog-ear P-90 that's rather special. G

GIBSON BILLIE JOE ARMSTRONG LES PAUL JUNIOR

PRICE: £2,199 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Mahogany, Billie Joe Armstrong SlimTaper profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.6")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/43.3mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, acrylic dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Aluminium wraparound bridge, Gibson Deluxe tuners w/ white buttons – nickel plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: Gibson P-90 DC Dogear humbucker, volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.31/7.3
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: The Original Series LP Junior is available in sunburst at £1,499; the twin-pickup Special in TV Yellow is £1,699. The Epiphone Billie Joe Armstrong LP Junior costs £529
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Silver Mist (as reviewed), Vintage Ebony – gloss nitro-cellulose

Gibson
www.gibson.com

8/10

PROS Great weight and good playability; hum-cancelling dog-ear pickup does the job well; stripped-down simplicity

CONS Not everyone will enjoy the minor finish issues or the sharp-edged body lip; quite an upcharge over the standard LP Junior

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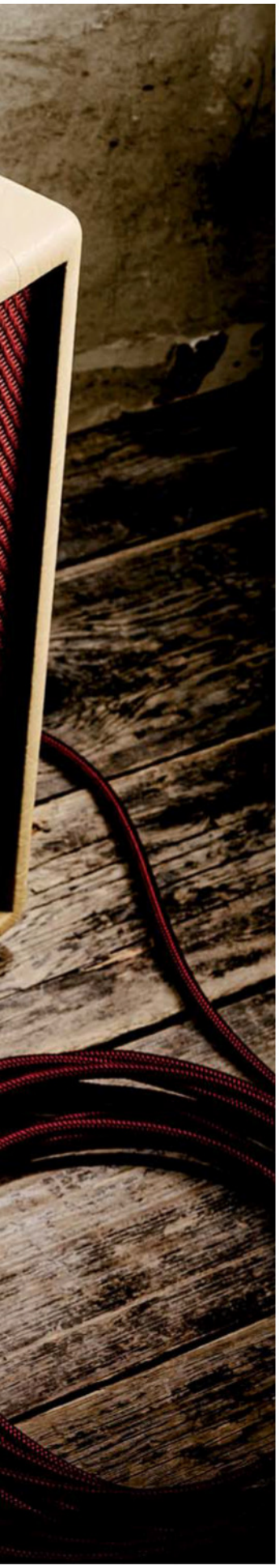


BLACKSTAR DEBUT 50R 1X12 COMBO
£209

WHAT IS IT? Dual-channel lightweight combo with 50 watts of Class D power (switchable down to five), stereo headphones/line out, series effects loop and two colour schemes

First Rate

Blackstar takes a break from floorboard amps and effects and expands its affordable practice amp range for gigging guitarists

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Olly Curtis

Over the past few months we've seen some truly revolutionary products from Blackstar, including the ultra-lightweight all-valve St James range and the Amped 1 and 2 compact pedalboard amplifiers. The Northampton-based amp builder's constantly evolving product catalogue caters for all guitarists, from beginner to touring professional, and while recent releases have focused on more experienced players, Blackstar pays just as much attention to players at the beginning of their journeys with the superb Debut 10 and Debut 15 amplifiers.

For those ready to move up from a home practice amp to their first gig-worthy amp that won't break the bank, there's an exciting new addition to the range that we're taking a look at here: the Debut 50R 1x12 combo. Like all Blackstar products, the new amp benefits from smart, modern styling that wouldn't look out of place in any stage or studio environment. Two different colours extend the Debut 50's appeal, with a choice of black vinyl and basket-weave grille, or this very cool cream and oxblood version, which has plenty of lounge-friendly vintage appeal.

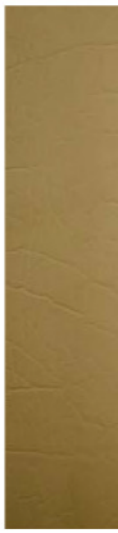
The Debut 50's custom-design 12-inch loudspeaker sits on a ported baffle, which helps project bass and low midrange, while the electronics sit inside a steel tray chassis, which also forms the top and rear control panels. Neatly laid out circuit boards and minimal wiring give off an impression of solid reliability, typical of all Blackstar products we've seen, and this amp benefits from a universal mains input, so it can't be accidentally plugged into the wrong voltage.

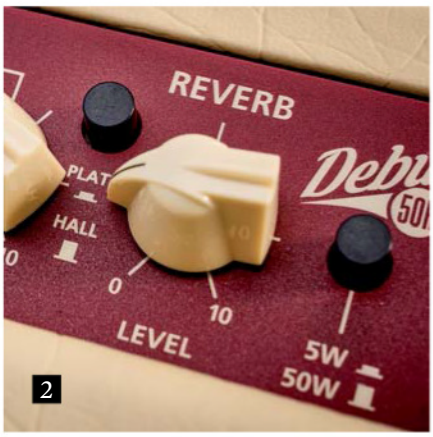
There are two footswitchable channels for clean and overdrive, with a single volume control for the Clean channel aided by a push-button Bright switch. The Overdrive channel controls include gain, volume and a shared three-band EQ enhanced by Blackstar's patented ISF (Infinite Shape Feature), which continuously varies the tone network between classic USA and classic British for a wide variety of subtle tone effects. The preamp uses discrete MOSFET (metal oxide semiconducting field effect) transistors arranged in a similar way to classic valve amp designs, for authentic valve-like distortion sounds, while the

1. The Debut 50R's Clean channel is based on Blackstar's HT-20 MkII valve amp and sounds warm and dynamic, with a Bright switch to boost highs when needed. Both channels share the same EQ controls, which include Blackstar's patented ISF (Infinite Shape Feature). The colour co-ordinated control panel and knobs look super cool

2. You have a choice of two different but equally impressive reverb effects: Plate and Hall. Plate has a little more high-end sizzle, while the Hall is slightly darker and warmer

3. The Overdrive channel has separate gain and volume controls for maximum flexibility when dialling in your favourite sounds. There's a ton of gain available to get you into the metal zone, but plenty of space in the lower quarter of the gain knob's travel for subtler effects





Blackstar has elevated the humble practice amp into a seriously good, very giggable combo

Class D power amplifier adds the benefit of easy portability. This carries over to the loudspeaker, which borrows technology from Blackstar's exclusive Celestion Zephyr design for light weight yet plenty of power handling.

Reverb comes courtesy of another custom Blackstar design, with a choice of Hall or Plate models, and there's an output level button, which lowers the Debut's output power from 50 watts down to a more manageable five watts for home use. Other rear-panel features include a series effects loop, a speaker-emulated line out for recording, which also doubles as a headphones socket, and a line-in for backing tracks. There's also a slot for a Kensington security lock, which makes the Debut 50R ideal for public areas such as unmanaged rehearsal studios. Overall, this combo is typical Blackstar: good-looking, compact and easy to carry.

Feel & Sounds

Based on Blackstar's HT-20 MkII, the Clean channel has plenty of headroom, making it an ideal partner for pedals. The Bright switch subtly lifts high frequencies, adding sparkle to single coils and a little extra snap to warm humbuckers. With the ISF control, you can change this channel's tonal centre to approximate classic American and British cleans for added authenticity when you're emulating a particular sound. Add a Strat and some delay and you can go from Hank Marvin to The Edge, while humbuckers can be coaxed into a jazz-approved growly warmth at moderate volume, as well as getting that classic butter-sweet funk rhythm tone from the neck and bridge together.

The Overdrive channel is based on the award-winning St James 6L6 amp and is equally rewarding to play, with dynamic Tweed-influenced blues and classic rock tones that respond naturally to how hard you hit the strings. All these sounds live in the first quarter of the Gain knob's travel, from which you can deduce there's tons of drive and distortion available to handle any genre up to modern metal.

Careful preamp design that mimics valve circuit behaviour and the powerful ISF-enhanced EQ make it easy to dial in practically any overdrive tone you want, while the reverb sweetens the decay for stadium-like sounds at bedroom volume levels. There's a choice of Hall or Plate

4. The Debut 50R's loudspeaker is a custom design that borrows technology from the exclusive Celestion Zephyr used in Blackstar's award-winning St James amps, combining high power and light weight without neodymium magnets

5. The rear panel features include a series effects loop, a speaker-emulated stereo line out, a line in and a footswitch socket for a two-button switch that toggles the channels and reverb effect. There's also a slot for a Kensington security lock to stop your amp from going AWOL

models and it's just down to personal taste which you prefer: the Hall is slightly warmer and darker, while the Plate has more high-frequency emphasis.

Another less obvious benefit is the headphones/line out socket, which is stereo and speaker-emulated, so you not only hear a great sound for practice but you can plug into a console and record it as well. Prod the output level switch and the Debut 50R's full 50 watts of Class D power is unleashed, with plenty of volume from the custom 12-inch loudspeaker to handle most smaller gigs without using the line out.

Verdict

In the real world where most of us live, it's not always practical – or possible – to justify spending huge sums of money on high-end guitar amplification, but that shouldn't mean losing out on great tone and the enjoyment of playing guitar. With its new Debut 50R, Blackstar has elevated the humble practice amp into a seriously good and very giggable combo.

We love its plug-in-and-go simplicity; with no presets to tweak or patches to save, what you see is essentially what you get and it only takes a few seconds to dial in. Add the reliability and consistency of the solid-state format, plus the sub-10kg payload and you should already be interested.

But the clincher here is surely the Debut 50R's asking price. For the cost of a couple of pints north of 200 quid, all this can be yours, making Blackstar's new runner practically a dead cert in the race to become this year's best-selling small combo. With two very handsome colour options to choose from, there's no excuse – and we think the Debut 50R is likely to be around for a long time.

BLACKSTAR DEBUT 50R 1X12 COMBO

PRICE: £209
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Analogue solid-state preamp/ Class D power amp
OUTPUT: 50W RMS into 4ohms, switchable to 5W
DIMENSIONS: 460mm (w) x 205mm (d) x 375mm (h)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 8.9/19.5
CABINET: Particle board
LOUDSPEAKER: 1x12 Blackstar custom design
CHANNELS: 2, with footswitchable overdrive and reverb
CONTROLS: Clean volume, clean channel bright switch, gain, volume, bass, middle, treble, ISF (Infinite Shape Feature), reverb level. Overdrive select switch, reverb plate/hall switch, power output switch
FOOTSWITCH: FS-8 footswitch (not supplied) toggles clean/overdrive channels and reverb
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Stereo headphones/ line out, line in, series effects loop, Kensington security lock slot
OPTIONS: The FS-8 footswitch is £49.99
RANGE OPTIONS: The Debut 15 combo sells for £86; the Debut 10 is £70

Blackstar Amplification Ltd
01604 817817
www.blackstaramps.com

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Very affordable first amp for budding band members; quality clean and overdrive channels; brilliant pedal platform; excellent reverbs; impressive price

CONS Hard to fault at this price – though the higher gain metal sounds do lose some dynamic range and the reverb tails could do with being a little longer

HARLEY BENTON FUSION-T 25TH

£399

WHAT IS IT? Affordable boutique bolt-on electric with nyatoh body, flame maple neck and 'board, and dual humbuckers

Boutique Beater

Harley Benton is celebrating its 25th with a slew of high-spec, lowly priced Anniversary models. We take one for a spin

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

Some 25 years in the music instrument business deserves a bit of a celebration, and although Harley Benton seems considerably younger, owner Thomann did kick off the brand in 1998. Time flies! While the majority of its guitars are lookalikes (the 25th series boasts an S-style, T-style, JM-style and LP-style, for example), the pair of Fusion models, an S-style double-cut and our T-style here, at least show off a more contemporary style seemingly inspired by the likes of Charvel and Suhr. Each 25th Anniversary model comes in a Firemist satin metallic finish that's more copper than gold, only slightly lighter-hued than the roasted maple neck and fingerboard.

The 45mm thick black-edge bound slab body is made from something called nyatoh, a 'utility' wood apparently used for making furniture and plywood, and it certainly contributes to a boutique-like light weight of 3.16kg (6.95lb). Along with a ribcage cut on the back, the heel is tastefully chamfered to reduce bulk – the neck screws sit in recessed washers so there's no neckplate. It's all crisply machined: a very tidy job.

Hats off for the neck work, too, which is really very good. The roasted maple back is lightly flamed, while big stainless-steel frets are well installed on the 305mm (12-inch) cambered fingerboard. A little more incurve to the edges of the fingerboard wouldn't go amiss, and perhaps some more edge rolling, but there's quite a classic 'C' feel to the profile and it doesn't feel skinny at all. It's not all a bed of roses, however, as our sample did need some basic setup work, including a small truss rod tweak (easy enough thanks to the spoke wheel adjustment nut in front of the 22nd fret), and the string height needed to be pulled down. Also, a quick rub with 0000 wire wool had the neck back move from papery to silky smooth in minutes.

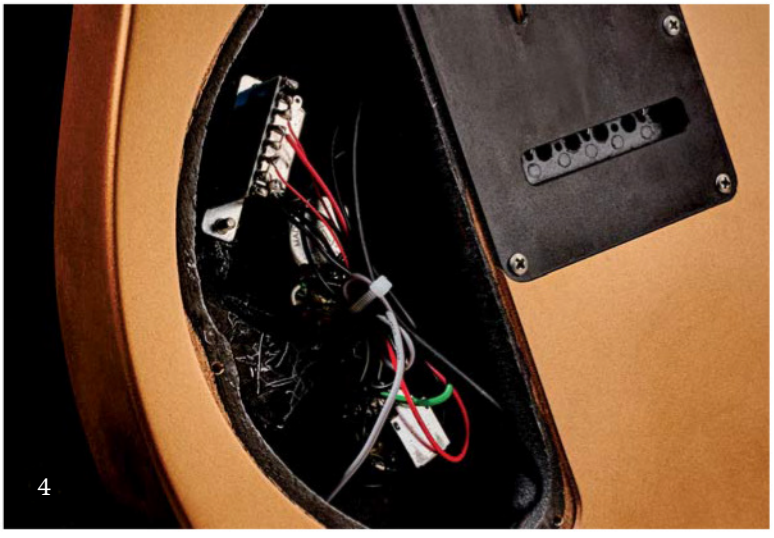
Sound-wise, it's no slouch, either. There's plenty of beef here that really suits a cranked Marshall, and the sound from the bridge 'bucker combines a crisp bite with a woody midrange. The neck is thick and surprisingly vocal, and the coil-splits (which voice the single screw coils of each humbucker) really aren't bad. The bridge is a little spikey perhaps, but both-on and neck are crisp and funky. Combine that with the light weight and that neck shape, not to mention the custom colour, and this is the epitome of affordable boutique.

1. The direct-mount VR-3 humbuckers here are made by Tesla, a Chinese brand with a pretty extensive catalogue. The wax-potted pickups use Alnico V bar magnets and heavy Formvar coil wire and have a pole spacing of 50mm (neck), 52mm (bridge) and measured DCRs of 7.64kohms and 8.98k respectively

2. Trev Wilkinson's VS-50 IIK vibrato is a close cousin of the original VS-100, and once you've set the height and intonation the saddles can be firmly locked in place. The top plate is steel with a die-cast block. We also get rear-locking tuners with staggered-height string posts. The nut is by Graph Tech and the stability is excellent once settled

3. The well-fitted and fettled stainless-steel frets are pretty big, measuring approximately 2.7mm wide by 1.4mm high. The neck is Fender-like in width, 42mm wide at the nut, with a depth of 21mm at the 1st fret and 23.8mm at the 12th. We also get glow-in-the-dark side dots

4 There's an oversized rear cavity that houses a pretty simple modern-wired circuit. The volume is Alpha 'Made in Korea' and measures 462kohms; the pull-push tone is 461k. There's a small 223J code .022µf tone cap and the five-way lever switch is a standard block style



HARLEY BENTON FUSION-T 25TH

PRICE: £399 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody bolt-on electric
BODY: Nyatoh
NECK: Roasted hard Canadian flamed maple, model 'C' profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Roasted hard Canadian flamed maple, black dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium/jumbo Blacksmith stainless steel
HARDWARE: Wilkinson VS-50 IIK two-point vibrato, staggered height locking tuners – chrome-plating
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: Tesla VR-3B Alnico 5 (bridge) and VR-3N Alnico 5 (neck), 3-way lever pickup selector, master volume and tone (w/ pull switch coil-split)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.16/6.95
OPTIONS: Not this model
RANGE OPTIONS: The standard Fusion-T HH is available in various colours from £269 and with EMG Retro Active Hot 70 humbuckers, hardtail bridge and gigbag at £422
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, same price
FINISH: Firemist satin metallic body; satin neck back and face

Harley Benton
www.harleybenton.com
www.thomann.de

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Crisply made; light weight; nicely shaped neck; big stainless-steel frets; good playability

CONS For the money, it's hard to fault, though our sample was in need of a basic setup

KORG NU:TEKT TR-S POWER TUBE REACTOR & HD-S HARMONIC DISTORTION
£199 each

WHAT IS IT? A pair of pedals that put Korg's Nutube technology at the heart of the circuitry

1

2

Build It Yourself

You won't put assembly-line workers out of a job, but you will get some cool sounds from Korg's Nutube-powered pedal kits

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

1. Peeling back this rubber strip gives you access to three trim pots that can be adjusted with the supplied tool, a screwdriver or similar pointy thing
2. This transparent section of the panel lets you see a light display that responds to your playing. With the HD-S, there are different colours to signify Harmonics 1, 2, and 3
3. The two pedals each come as a kit that you have to assemble, although all that involves is screwing on the baseplate and pushing the knobs onto their splines

Sold as 'kits', the self-assembly aspect of the Nu:Tekt TR-S Power Tube Reactor and HD-S Harmonic Distortion is actually limited to screwing on the bottom plate, sticking four rubber feet on and putting the knobs in place, with the addition of a sheet of stickers to 'customise' your pedal. That far-from-difficult aspect aside, each pedal looks a most interesting prospect based around Korg's Nutube, which, the company says, operates exactly as a triode vacuum valve. Besides a set of four knobs, each pedal has three front-panel trim pots to adjust various parameters.

The Power Tube Reactor is designed to deliver the warmth and response of a valve amp. Its circuit design can mimic the sag of a vacuum valve power amp where the sound compresses momentarily in response to transients. That's added via a dedicated knob, aided by trim pots for setting the threshold level where the sag effect begins and adjusting sustain time. The third trim pot is a practically targeted tone control. This is a drive pedal that feels right, reacting positively to your dynamics so you can transition from clean to dirt just with your playing. The amount of valve-like grit and drive can be dialled in via the Tube Gain knob and you can get as subtle or full-on as you like as a Mix knob offers parallel blends of dry and compressed/driven sound. While it's great for use as a straight-up drive, tone thickener/conditioner and boost, it could also be a good way of adding some power amp-style sag into your tone if you haven't got the option of using a decent valve amp at volume.

The Harmonic Distortion is a distortion pedal created by Fumio Mieda, designer of the original Uni-Vibe. Not wanting to rehash the sounds of the past, Fumio has developed what's described as an all-new "never-before heard" kind of distortion based on harmonic synthesis. Three different distortion circuits – dialled in with the three Harmonic trim pots – can be used singly or combined to create everything from traditional cranked stack-style distortion sounds, through a range of fuzz shadings to highly resonant, raucous distortion at the more extreme end of the scale. It can get a bit wild, but an adjustable noise gate can bracket out the noise and keep things in shape.

Verdict

Korg has cleverly gone beyond the traditional dirt pedal paradigm with these Nu:Tekt offerings, delivering alternative options that are both innovative and practical. Oh, and nice stickers, too! G

THE RIVALS

The Harmonic Generator is quite unique in its operation, so let's look at a couple of others that also do their own thing: The Gamechanger Audio Plasma pedal (£249) creates heavy distortion by amplifying an audio signal up to 3,500 volts and transforming it into electrical discharges, while the Kernom Ridge (£269) has a Mood knob that drastically alters the clipping style of the dirt sounds it produces. For the Power Tube Reactor, you may be able to get similar results with a compressor and drive pedal combination. If you have money to spend, the Origin Effects RevivalDrive (£495) gives you comprehensive control over vintage valve amp parameters.

KORG NU:TEKT TR-S POWER TUBE REACTOR & HD-S HARMONIC DISTORTION

PRICE: £199 each
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Drive and distortion pedals
FEATURES: Buffered Bypass
CONTROLS (Power Tube Reactor): Volume, Power Sag, Mix, Tube Gain, Tone, Sustain, Threshold, Bypass footswitch
CONTROLS: (Harmonic Distortion): Volume, Tone, Gate, Chain, Harmonic (1, 2, 3), Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 45mA (HD-S), 85mA (TR-S)
DIMENSIONS: 122 (w) x 96 (d) x 55mm (h)

Korg
01908 304664
www.korg.co.uk

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Nutube technology gives authentic valve-like response; solid construction; practical size; innovative design

CONS We don't quite get why these are called 'kits'; on-the-fly adjustments are not practical with trim pots

BEETRONICS SEABEE HARMOCHORUS
£409

WHAT IS IT? An analogue BBD chorus pedal with digital control

New Dimension

Beetronics takes the chorus effect and sweetens it with an extra layer of pitch shifting to offer an endlessly creative tool

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

1. The left-hand footswitch operates the Ramp effect: hold to trigger ramp up, release to trigger ramp down. It also offers tap tempo for the modulation
2. The opposite footswitch is Bypass – a single tap turns the effect on/off, a double-tap inverts ramp direction. It can also be held to activate alternate control functions
3. These preset LEDS indicate the preset/bank you're in. Tapping both footswitches simultaneously will get you to preset selection mode. There are four colour-coded banks of four presets; LEDs off indicates Live mode

Beetronics has invented a new sub-genre in effects pedals by describing its new Seabee pedal as a 'Harmochorus'. At its heart, this is an analogue bucket-brigade chorus pedal that has been complemented with digital control of the chorus delay time to make the chorus wave bounce up and down in precise pitches. This creates a pitch-shifting modulation that the company says has never been found in any other pedal. The knobs, toggle switches and footswitches, plus alternative functions, offer loads to get to grips with as there's so much that can be dialled in, but, fortunately, the pedal has onboard presets, so any sound that you conjure up can be stored.

The basic starting point is the Effect toggle switch, which lets you select Chorus or Harmochorus, and each of these effects has three modes. Now, while there's a jack to take an expression pedal and more, much of what the pedal does is based on performance features direct from the pedal itself: a footswitchable Ramp effect where you can trigger movement. You can adjust the ramp speed and have a choice of three different ramp shapes and the ability to invert their direction. The actual ramping is assigned to a specific parameter depending on the selected mode.

The Chorus section has Roto, Depth and Sting modes. The first, Roto, is similar to a rotary speaker whereby you can ramp the rate control of the chorus giving you two different speeds. Dual mode lets you ramp the modulation depth, while Sting mode ramps the chorus delay time. Meanwhile, Harmochorus has a Dual mode with two speeds/two pitches, so you can ramp between two modulating harmonies. The Arp mode features arpeggio-like modulation movements with selectable pattern and chord stack, and, finally, Mad mode is more of the same but with random pitch patterns. Phew!

At its most basic, this pedal can produce some of the lushest static conventional chorus and vibrato sounds around, but it's an extremely creative tool and goes way beyond that to create a quite extraordinary array of alternative modulation sounds and textures with loads of movement that can be fully exploited in real-time with some judicious footswitching.

Verdict

If you want a modulation pedal with a difference, this will reward you with sounds that you won't find elsewhere. You'll have to dig deep – both with the controls and within your wallet – to find them, though... G

BEETRONICS
SEABEE
HARMOCHORUS

PRICE: £409
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Modulation pedal
FEATURES: Buffered Bypass, 16 presets (8 factory, 8 user), full MIDI control, 4 input level options
CONTROLS: Ramp/Tone, Rate/Mix, Depth/Feedback, Ramp switch, Modes switch, Effect switch, Ramp/Tap footswitch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard mono output, standard stereo, standard expression/footswitch socket
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 250 mA
DIMENSIONS: 90 (w) x 140 (d) x 70mm (h)

FACE bvba
+32 3 844 67 97

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Solid build; presets; stereo operation; huge variety of sounds

CONS There's a lot to get your head around; it ain't exactly cheap

THE RIVALS

The Eventide TriceraChorus (£189) is another double footswitch chorus pedal. It pairs stereo bucket-brigade-style chorusing with the brand's MicroPitch detuning and has three modes (Chorus, Vibrato, and Chorale), three independent chorus voices (Left, Center, Right) and footswitch-triggered effects. If you want to spend more money, the Eventide H9 Max (£649) is effectively an 'Eventide's greatest hits' pedal that will give you chorus, pitch shifting and loads more. Walrus Audio's Julianna (£249) is another well-specified chorus pedal. Among other features, it has sine, triangle and random LFO shapes and a Drift function to gently speed up and slow down the LFO rate.

Eventide TriceraChorus: dual-footswitch tri-stereo pedal

theWishlist

Dream gear to beg, borrow and steal for...

Taylor Builder's Edition 814ce £5,399

CONTACT **Taylor Guitars** WEB **www.taylorguitars.com** WORDS **David Mead** PHOTOGRAPHY **Olly Curtis**

Taylor's established flagship Grand Auditorium 814ce model has received an upgrade in the form of a Builder's Edition. In other words, a guitar that has already breached the summit of the Taylor range has had some additional luxurious appointments lavished upon it. So what's new, exactly?

There are some structural refinements hidden under the hood, but as far as the parts you can see, Taylor has kept to the basic 814ce formula inasmuch as the top is spruce and back and sides Indian rosewood, but on this Builder's Edition the spruce is Adirondack instead of Sitka. Furthermore, and possibly controversially, it's a four-piece top. This might raise a few eyebrows among the acoustic purists, but Taylor's chief designer Andy Powers says that the reason is pure and simple: it's a question of supply.

Adirondack spruce of the type of quality Taylor is seeking – and that's in large enough pieces to form a guitar top – is in short supply these days, and rather than simply stop using it altogether, Andy says that fashioning a four-piece top via cunning lutherie actually avails more control over the guitar's tonal finesse.

Why not just take the easy route and stick with Sitka spruce? Well, the benefits that Addie brings to the table are significant in that it's a timber renowned for extra dynamic range, power and clarity. Just what's needed in a special edition, in fact. And when combined with a rosewood back and sides, the resulting timbre offers up complex overtones and everything from a very musical whisper to a sonorous roar in terms of output.

Other features here include a bevelled cutaway as well as the lower bout armrest that is already a staple of the standard 814ce. The player comfort factor is taken up yet another notch via the rounded rims around the guitar's edge – no more uncomfy sharp edges to deal with while strumming.

Sound-wise, this Builder's Edition 814ce is everything you'd wish an acoustic at this price point to be. It's extremely comfortable to play, with a wonderful feel to the neck and fingerboard and a rich, loud 'n' proud tone that suits everything from wild pick-work to the very gentlest fingerstyle. Everyone here who played it had the same opinion – it's quite simply a masterpiece.

1. The tuners here are Taylor-badged but made by Gotoh. They sit astride what Taylor refers to as its "paddle standard" headstock, the facing of which is West African ebony with a mother-of-pearl logo

2. East Indian rosewood adorns the 814ce's back and sides, with the back being treated to an edgeburst finish, which gives the guitar's rear that extra touch of class

3. Down at the ebony bridge there's a Micarta saddle and the string pins are West African ebony with green abalone dots. The pickup is Taylor's Expression System 2; it sits behind the saddle, a position said to improve dynamic response

4. The guitar's top is Adirondack spruce and whereas it's customary for an acoustic's top to be a two-piece, here it's a four-piece. Taylor tells us this is down to a very limited supply of timber of the right quality

5. It's becoming more common to find armrest bevels on modern acoustics, but the Builder's Edition also has a bevel in the cutaway to increase the comfort factor when accessing the uppermost frets

6. Another tonal enhancement is the inclusion of Taylor's revolutionary V-Class bracing system that is currently being rolled out across the company's acoustic line

THE LINEUP

Gas Supply

Our pick of the month's most delectable and wallet-bothering new gear

Epiphone Casino, Sheraton & Broadway From £719

CONTACT **Epiphone** PHONE **00800 444 27661** WEB **www.epiphone.com**

JARGON CRUNCHING

Epiphonology
It's been 150 years, but you might still be wondering where Epiphone got its name. When Greek-born founder Anastasios Stathopoulos (who moved his family to New York in the early 1900s) died in 1915, his son Epaminondas took over and devised the portmanteau Epiphone from his name and the translation of 'voice'.

Oh, cool – some affordable Gibson replicas!

Well, yes and no. As Epiphone turns 150, these three refreshed archtops celebrate the brand's heritage – and while some inspiration for the originals came from the Gibson bloodline, we think they've been around long enough to be considered classics in their own right, rather than 'the affordable Gibson'. There's a Casino, Sheraton and Broadway, all of which have been updated for 2023 with 'historical' specs and finishes.

The Casino and Sheraton look like ES-335s...

We'll start with the Sheraton, which bears the most resemblance of the trio to an ES-335. This model is a thinline semi-acoustic with a double-cutaway, all-maple laminate body that's fitted with a maple centre block. The key differences from the 335 on this version, though, are that Epiphone has opted for its traditional Frequensator tailpiece over the LockTone commonly accompanying tune-o-matic bridges. In addition, take a look at the pickups and you'll notice that these are mini-humbuckers, rather than full-fat PAF-alikes. In this case, they're mini-ProBuckers, and we get the feeling that this in-between pickup could be bang on-trend following multiple brands announcing mini-humbucker guitars at the NAMM Show in April. The Sheraton comes in Natural and Vintage Sunburst finishes.

ANNIVERSARY

Epiphone is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year, and these guitars look back to some of its hollowbody and semi-hollow body heritage

PICKUPS

There are three flavours of pickup across the three guitars. The Casino (far left) features P-90s, the Sheraton (middle) has mini-humbuckers and the Broadway (right) is fitted with humbuckers

VINTAGE STYLING

With either a Diamond Trapeze (Casino) or Frequensator (Sheraton and Broadway) tailpiece, vintage-style pickups and traditional Epiphone logos/inlays, these guitars are aimed at fans of tradition

2023 FINISHES

Vintage Sunburst appears across the trio, with the Broadway also offered in Wine Red, and the Casino and Sheraton in Natural

Mother-of-pearl and abalone headstock inlays lend an air of tradition and class to the Broadway

What's the Frequensator, Kenneth?

That idea for this tailpiece arrived in the 1930s and has continued to be used ever since. The theory is that by extending the length of the bass strings, and shortening the treble strings, it's possible to even out some of the tonal discrepancies between the two. So what you get is tighter, less overbearing bass and smoother, less bright trebles: the frequencies are compensated, thus the Frequensator name was born.

That Broadway looks sturdy!

Yes, if you like a big-box archtop then this jazzer will do the trick. While the pre-Gibson Broadway was released in 1931, this is actually the design most of us will be more familiar with. Earlier models had more of an arch to them, but this guitar still wears its acoustic projection on its sleeve with a Select spruce top and maple back and sides. Just like the Sheraton, the Broadway is all about tradition, rather than hot-rodded attitude, so once again we get that Frequensator, gold hardware throughout, and enough mollusc shell on display to rival Rick Stein's freezer.

Electronically, it's the classic Gibson two-volume/two-tone/three-position switch combo, this time connected to a pair of Alnico Classic Pro humbuckers. You can get it in Wine Red and Vintage Sunburst.

All right then, what about the Casino?

The Casino is arguably Epiphone's best-known electric guitar design thanks to a couple of fab lads from Liverpool. Oh, and a bloke called Keef played his part, too. Unlike the Sheraton, though, the Casino has a fully-hollow body, though it's once again made from laminated (or "layered", as Epiphone calls it) maple. The model follows the same 'Gibson' traditions with a 628mm (24.75-inch) scale length and 22 frets, and this version is fitted with an Indian laurel fretboard. Pair that with P-90s and you've got the core of the Casino sound; here, those pickups are a pair of nickel-covered dog-ear Pro-P-90s. It's available in Vintage Sunburst and Natural finishes.

How much are they?

The Casino is £719, the Sheraton is £779 and the Broadway costs £999. All three guitars are available now with an Epiphone Premium gigbag and as either left- or right-handed models. **[SW]**

ALSO OUT NOW...

NEURAL DSP ARCHETYPE: TOM MORELLO €119

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Building on its MJ Series, which gives a nod to the much-loved 90s-era Japanese import guitars, Jackson has added a tweaked version of its MJ Rhoads RRT model to the line-up. With a basswood body, three-piece through-body maple neck, and compound radius ebony fingerboard with 22 frets, plus a pair of Seymour Duncans (JB and Jazz at the bridge and neck respectively), it's identical to the existing MJ RRT. Except it now comes in Snow White. Elsewhere, it's fitted with Gotoh locking tuners, a Graph Tech Tusq nut and a Jackson tune-o-matic-style bridge. It also comes with a Jackson Foam Core case.
www.jacksonguitars.com

THE LINEUP

Fretbuzz

A monthly look at must-hear artists from all corners of the guitar world, from the roots of their sound to the tracks that matter most

Artist: Juni Habel

Album: Carvings (Basin Rock)

Carvings is Juni Habel's second album release. Juni will be playing Green Man Festival in August **https://junihabel.bandcamp.com**

Juni Habel is a Norwegian singer-songwriter based in Rakkestad, in the south of the country. She crafts beautiful hazy folk songs, centred around her acoustic guitar picking and with minimal backing. The acclaimed *Carvings* is her second album, following 2020's *All Ears*. "Both of my albums have been based around the guitar playing and vocals," Juni tells us. "My vision for them was very minimalistic; I just wanted to play my songs. If anything else fitted then we could add it, but it was mainly about the song."

Just Enough

This minimalist approach gives Juni's work a sound that feels timeless and suits the rural nature of her surroundings. "I'm very conscious of keeping things away," she says. "It can be very tempting and safer to dress the songs with cool things. You can think that the more you add will make the song better and richer and more exciting. Or you could be scared that the listener might get bored. But my co-producer Stian [Skaaden] and I talk a lot about this and we take things away the whole time. We tried so much stuff [when recording], but kept about 10 per cent. I'm grateful to him because he would say to me, 'This is enough, it doesn't need to be more.'"

Gut Feeling

Carvings is a beautiful collection of deep writing; life and death are considered on songs that are happy to last past the five- or six-minute mark. The whole thing feels self-assured. "I'm getting more and more confident," Juni says. "In the beginning, I wasn't confident at all and I would call my friends and family to hear their opinions of things. But now I'm trusting my gut and trusting my own sense. I now know what is right for the song, which is a skill I'm developing more." She pauses. "That can take a lot of time and it can be messy; you are not guaranteed to end somewhere good, either – and I have done that. Sometimes the song just doesn't land and it never gets finished."

Why So Serious?

Juni comes across as a meticulous writer and musician, an artist set on the crafting of her songs and protective over the delicacy of her arrangements, something she is aware of. "An important part of this project has been about realising how to not take music so seriously," she says. "This was very serious in the beginning and the topics were deep, but songs like *When We Awake* and *Drifting Pounds Of The Train* were very cathartic to write because they were saying that I don't have to fight so hard to make great music – because it doesn't matter that much. Life is much bigger than music, so there is not much at stake. Nobody will get hurt."

Emotion Rules

When starting out on guitar, players such as Neil Young and fellow Norwegian Ane Brun informed Juni, but she has reached a level where her own objectives have become clearer. "My goal is to do as little as possible and to add a lot of emotion," she says. "But I also like to play with varying tempos – it is a more experimental and performance-based way of looking at the guitar. [New Zealand singer-songwriter] Aldous Harding is a big hero of mine and I was thinking, 'Wow, can you really play it like that? Is that allowed?' It was so simple, the most basic chords, but played with so much emotion. She was a revelation to me." **[GK]**

Stand out track: *Drifting Pounds Of The Train*
For fans of: Beth Orton, Joni Mitchell, Ane Brun, Joanna Newsom

Norway's Juni Habel favours bare-bones arrangements that let the stories within her songs speak for themselves

PHOTO BY STEVEN WARBURTON

PRACTICAL MAGIC

Juni sees guitars simply as vehicles for her music

Juni chooses a nylon-string guitar to deliver her songs, though she admits to not being the best at maintenance. "The nylon-string guitar is obviously the most beautiful instrument in the world," she says, "but I don't care much about equipment. I have the cheapest gear to record, except a good microphone. I don't care about the brand, but I like old guitars. I have two, both are from the 70s: the one I use the most is an Oskar Teller guitar that I got from a builder in Copenhagen. It's great, but I'm bad at taking care of it. My husband is a guitarist, too, and I can be clumsy. He's often like this [makes face of despair]!"

PHOTO BY STEVEN WARBURTON

THE LINEUP

Albums

The month's best guitar music – a hand-picked selection of the finest fretwork on wax

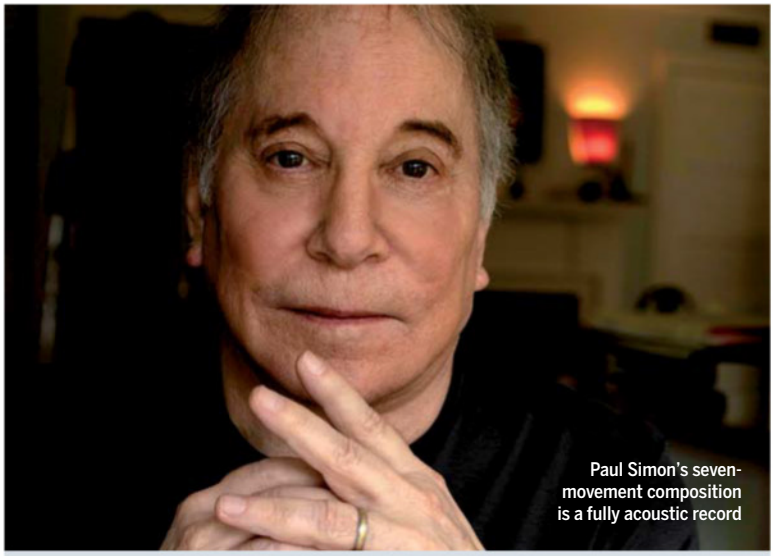


PHOTO BY MYRNA SUAREZ

Paul Simon's seven-movement composition is a fully acoustic record

Paul Simon

Seven Psalms

Owl Records/Legacy Recordings (available now)

8/10

Strange but beautiful album from songwriting icon

Back in 2018 Paul Simon released *In The Blue Light*, which comprised a reimagining of some of his lesser-known songs from his decades-long career. It was also the year in which he announced that he was to stop touring and just about everyone believed that this meant the beginning of a well-earned retirement and no more studio releases.

As it turns out, we got it wrong and earlier this year he announced the forthcoming release of *Seven Psalms*. But if you were expecting more of the same, you may want to think again. *Seven Psalms* is a single piece of music in seven sections – even the digital streaming version is just one continuous piece – and if ever there was an artist acknowledging that this might be his final work, this is it. The presence of the word 'Psalm' in the album's title offers a clue to the content and the titles within the 33-minute running time, which include *The Lord*, *Your Forgiveness* and *The Sacred Harp*, pre-inform the listener even further.

Instrumentation is sparse – it's mainly Simon's acoustic guitar and a scattering of percussion – and the lyrical content is semi-religious and deeply philosophical. Put it this way, *Graceland* it ain't. Instead, we're taken away on a beguiling journey as the music unfolds, a summing up of a rich musical legacy, and a solo work in all senses of the word, apart from occasional vocal accompaniment by the Grammy-nominated Voces8 and Simon's wife, Edie Brickell. Thought-provoking, quirky and deeply moving, it demands multiple listens. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Your Forgiveness*
For fans of: Joni Mitchell, James Taylor

Joni Mitchell

At Newport

Rhino (release date: 28 July)

9/10

Newport's 'Joni Jam' immortalised on disc

One of the biggest surprises of 2022 was Joni Mitchell's return to the stage at the Newport Festival after a 20-year absence. Virtually the whole set has been available on YouTube since it happened, but here it's available in tip-top quality – and there's even a Dolby Atmos version available if you really want to bathe in the festival atmosphere. The fun part is hearing the crowd's audible intake of breath – and subsequent tumultuous applause – when Brandi Carlile summons Joni on stage during the first track. From then on, the magic just keeps on happening: *Big Yellow Taxi*, *A Case Of You*, *Both Sides Now* and the audience sing-along on *The Circle Game* are worth the cost of admission alone, but there are priceless gems here aplenty. Welcome back, Joni! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Both Sides Now*
For fans of: James Taylor, CSNY

Roberto Restuccia

Lounge Katz

Trippin & Rhythm (available now)

9/10

Plush, stylish jazz-blues in the Benson and Carlton tradition

Smooth jazz is a much-maligned genre and, in truth, the line between sweet melody and Ceefax-ready muzak that's merely local anaesthetic for the ears can be perilously fine. So it's a mark of genuine talent when a guitarist working in the smooth jazz style can not only stay well to the right side of that boundary but produce work that stands comparison with the established greats of jazz-blues such as Robben Ford and Larry Carlton. And, by George (Benson), we think UK guitarist Roberto Restuccia has done it with *Lounge Katz*, his second album on the Trippin & Rhythm label. Listen to the ear-beguiling groove of *Phone Box* and you hear shades of Tom Scott and The LA Express in the arrangement, but also a new poise and creativity in Restuccia's playing, in which dexterity is the agile servant of mature phrasing. Meanwhile, *Butterfly* shows off a lovely touch with slow blues. *Lounge Katz* is, overall, the sound of a very good guitarist on his way to becoming a great one. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Phone Box*
For fans of: George Benson, Larry Carlton, Steely Dan

The four-album boxset showcases both experimentation and core blues from Gary

Gary Moore
The Sanctuary Years
BMG (available now)

8/10

Box of delights from late guitar legend

From 1999 to 2004, Gary Moore was signed to the Sanctuary label, releasing the albums *A Different Beat* (1999), *Back To The Blues* (2001), *Scars* (2002) and *Power Of The Blues* (2004). This boxset seeks to revisit all four albums, with brand-new liner notes, a few bonus tracks and a Blu-ray disc containing a 5.1 remix of *Back To The Blues* and sundry interviews. Inside the box you'll also find some stickers, a poster and other memorabilia. Obviously aimed at the fanbase hardcore and collectors alike, the albums cover Gary's experimenting with the slightly offbeat – on *A Different Beat* and *Scars* – and rejoicing in his blues heartland on the other two albums. The bonus material includes live versions of *Stormy Monday* and *Cold Black Night* and the 5.1 remix adds an extra dimension to Gary's blues firepower. Completists will rejoice! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Stormy Monday*
For fans of: Thin Lizzy, BB King, Albert King

Dominic Miller
Vagabond
ECM (available now)

8/10

Introspective, jazzy eloquence from Sting sideman

When he's not pounding out the chords to *Roxanne* on stage with Sting, Dominic Miller is showcasing his more reflective, sombre side with his solo acoustic material. Here, on this eight-track record, Dominic is in the company of Jacob Karlzon on keyboards, Nicolas Fiszman on bass and Ziv Ravitz on the drums, who provide sparse and thoughtful accompaniment to his nylon-string guitar. This is never more evident than on the track *Open Heart*, a sedate, multi-textured and quite beautiful track that twists and turns in contrasting layers. "It's never been my intention to make a guitar album," says Dom. "Thanks to the amazing singers I've worked with over the years, I see myself more as an instrumental songwriter." The result is a coming together of like musical minds on an album that stays in your head long after the final notes have faded away. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Open Heart*
For fans of: Pat Metheny, Earl Klugh

THE LINEUP

Tones Behind The Tracks

Nuno Bettencourt tells us about the "torture" of recording *Six*, the return of rock 'n' roll mythology, and the solo that set the guitar world ablaze

Artist: Extreme
Album: Six (earMUSIC)

Five years after *Saudades de Rock* was released, Extreme are back with new album, *Six*

What's missing from many players capable of mind-boggling guitar tricks? "The emotional and physical element that matches the song," says Nuno. And that magic is there in spades on *Six*

Nuno Bettencourt is bracing himself for the inevitable. Having turned in arguably the most dazzling solo of the post-millennium on Extreme's recent single *Rise* – an unfeasible thrill-ride of scalded tremolo picking, whammy abuse and palm-muted undulations – the 56-year-old virtuoso must now face a global guitar press that demands to know how the magic trick is done.

He'll take the plaudits. But if there's just a hint of amiable impatience in Bettencourt's interview manner, perhaps that's because the guitarist has been raising the technical bar since Extreme started out in mid-80s Boston, and new album, *Six*, is far from a one-trick pony.

Do you enjoy being in the studio these days?

"No, I fucking hate recording albums. There's nothing more torturous to me. Why? Because I see and hear things from the day that I write them. It's like a painter that already sees the painting. And now I've got to go through the fucking pain of realising that vision."

What subjects did you write about for *Six*?

"*The Mask* was inspired by the Japanese philosophy that we all wear three faces. There's the one we show the world. There's the one we only show to loved ones. Then there's the third face we keep for ourselves and the secrets we never share with anybody. *Rebel* is about social media and how people can have a cup of coffee in one hand, write #BlackLivesMatter then go to work. And they're part of a movement! They changed the world!"

Did you expect *Rise* to be such a talked about solo?

"I had zero idea. A part of me was like, 'Wow, this is great.' And a part of me was confused. I'll take it. I'm definitely not looking down on it and it's super exciting. Especially when your peers and people you really admire, y'know – Brian May, Steve Vai, Zakk Wylde, Steve Lukather – are all texting me. But the Virgo in me is always trying to analyse things and ask why. Why is that solo getting this reaction? Because for me, yeah, it's a decent guitar solo, but I feel like I've been playing solos like that for 35 years. And a lot of the fans from back in the day, from their comments, I think they agree with me. They're like, 'Oh, you guys only noticed now that he did this kind of thing in *Peacemaker Die*?'"

What's your theory on why that *Rise* solo has been so feted?

"If you look at the last 15 years, there's so many great players out there. I follow them on the socials and they're jaw-dropping. They're doing stuff where my only comment is, 'Go fuck yourself.' Because I can't do that. But what I notice is that these players are sitting in a room playing these mind-boggling parts. But that's it. The emotional and physical element, that's not there. What I think happened with *Rise* was, the mythology of rock 'n' roll happened. That's what we've been missing. There's a song there. There's harmony. There's hooks. There's an arrangement. There's a video. There's a band going for blood. And the guitar player is not just sitting in a chair. He's having fun and there's a physical and emotional element that matches the song."

Which other parts on the new album would you direct people to?

"I don't even know that *Rise* is my favourite solo on the album. People might think I'm crazy if I tell them that the next single, *Other Side Of The Rainbow*,

PHOTO COPYRIGHT EARMUSIC BY FRANKIE PEPPER

is the best one. When *Rebel* came out, I remember one guy commenting, 'Good solo, but it's not as jaw-dropping as *Rise*.' And I say to myself, 'That's the greatest compliment anybody can give me.' Because it's not the Olympics that I'm part of. Technically, if 'jaw-dropping' is what people want then they're missing the point. *Rebel* is the best solo for *Rebel*. *Banshee* is the best solo for *Banshee* because it stays within the culture of the song. I don't like guitar players that try to impress people with every solo."

What gear did you reach for on *Six*?

"I mean, look, I've always been a bit boring. Maybe the amp changes, but nothing else really does. In this case, it was a Marshall JCM2000 DSL. But I use it very differently. If people saw my settings, they'd probably think somebody fucked with them. Because the Presence is at, like, 1. The Treble is at 1. Midrange, same thing. Bass is up at, like, 4. And then I turn it up. People are like, 'Why do you take all that EQ off?' And I say, 'Well, when I play it louder, it's perfect for me.' It's punchy and it sounds good and loud, and it's not annoying, and I feel like I can bend notes up high and it just works for me.

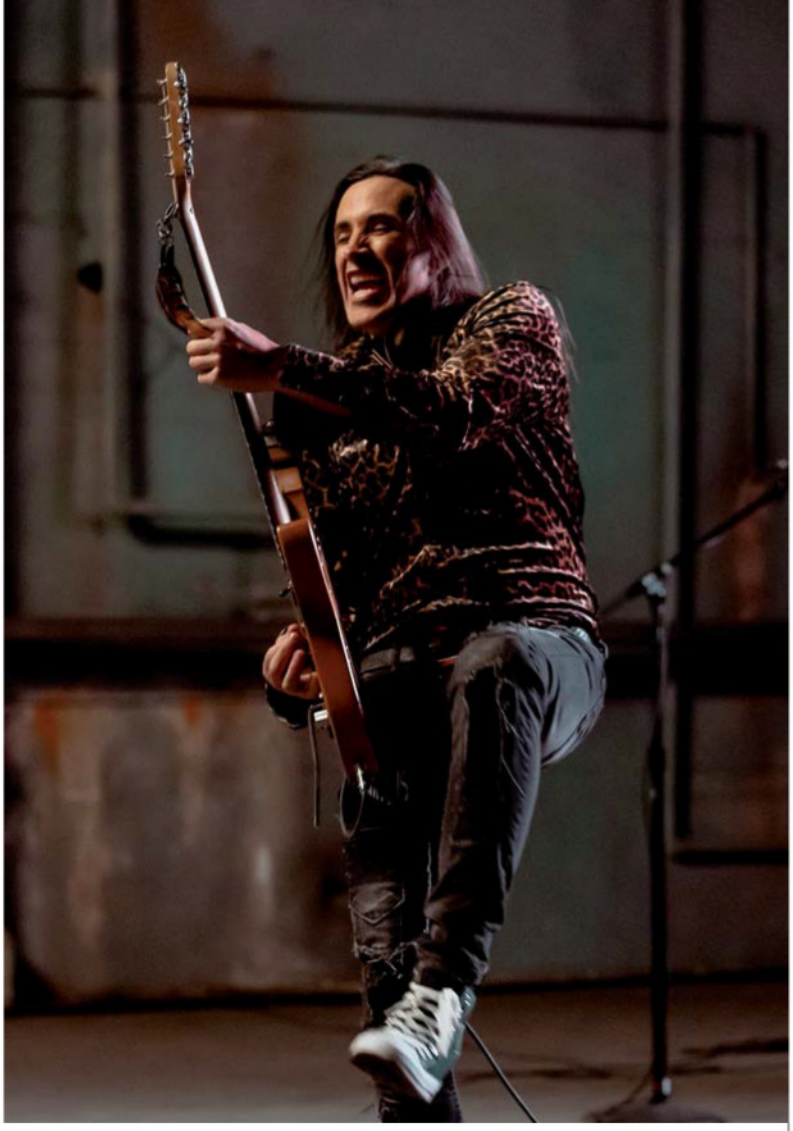
"Other than that, I have my same Rat pedal I've used for decades. I don't use it for distortion, it's for a filter to tighten my bottom-end, that's it."

Why have you stayed so faithful to your Washburn signature series?

"No offence to Washburn, but it's Washburn putting out my guitar, it's not me playing a Washburn guitar. That guitar was cut, designed and built for me, and as shitty as it is to most people, it's just what I like. It's the pickup I like, it's the way I like the neck. I pick up other guitars, but 80 per cent of the album is my N4, and I use that Nele I have on two songs, and then I used an N7 seven-string on *X Out*. That was about it. Y'know, my N4 is an old baseball glove. It's broken in and it interprets me the best way."

The guitars really jump out of the speakers – how did you produce them?

"Yeah, it's very in-your-face. I remember, I was playing the album at Steve Vai's studio for him and he stopped and said, 'How did you get the guitars to be right here, next to my ear?' I said to him, 'I don't do anything.' It's a [Shure] SM57 with a [Sennheiser] 421, side by side, off-axis, right above the centre of the speaker. And it's just loud. I try to make it as if your face is right in front of the cabinet."



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"With *Rise*, the mythology of rock 'n' roll happened. There's a song there, a harmony, hooks, an arrangement. A band going for blood"

Nuno's Washburn signatures dominate on the new record. "My N4 is an old baseball glove. It's broken in and it interprets me the best way," he says

Do you feel it's getting harder to create original guitar parts?

"Oh, we're all plagiarising. There is not one thing that comes out of my body, mind or soul that is my original idea. But what we're doing is taking all those things that influenced us and rearranging the ingredients. As Zakk Wylde says, we all have our soup. You take a spoonful, you're gonna taste a bit of Beck, a bit of Brian May. Some songs are gonna taste really strongly of Brian May. Others won't taste of him at all. But there's nothing wrong with that. Even someone they say was a 'godfather', like Chuck Berry – that came from somewhere, y'know?

"Most of the true heroes are the heroes behind the heroes – the people we saw once in a fucking local bar. People don't need to beat themselves up over it, you know. What you need to do is let go, be yourself and let it rip." **[HY]**

Extreme's *Six* is available now via earMUSIC

https://extreme-band.com

CONFESSIONS OF A LUTHIER

Count Your Blessings

As *Guitarist* magazine celebrates its 500th issue, **Alex Bishop** approaches the completion of his 50th hand-built guitar

Guitar making is a world of repetition: whether it's buffing out frets, French polishing the soundboard, or fine-tuning nut slots, lutherie offers plenty of opportunities to meditate and reflect. So it came to me – prompted by the realisation that *Guitarist* was nearing the publication of its 500th issue – that I was approaching a milestone of my own. The guitar I am currently building is (depending on how you count it) my 50th hand-built acoustic guitar.

"Almost all of the significant developments in guitar design originated in low-output ateliers, so I feel we have a duty to continue the tradition"

Given that I was drawn into the world of guitar making by the sounds of Django Reinhardt, it feels appropriate that the instrument taking shape on my workbench closely resembles the classic blueprint set by the Selmer-Maccaferri guitars of the 1930s. Regular readers will be familiar with my affinity for these convention-busting jazz boxes, and they continue to fascinate and excite me more than 15 years on. As per the client's request, this particular model is a close homage to those original D-hole guitars, with the same green and red rosette stripes, 12-fret body join and shorter 640mm (25.2-inch) scale length. As my guitar-making experience has grown, I've now come to favour the punchy tonality and compactness of these modestly appointed instruments over their top-heavy, long-necked brethren.

Alex's latest build, a D-hole jazz guitar, pays homage to one of his biggest inspirations – the 1930s Selmer-Maccaferri guitars

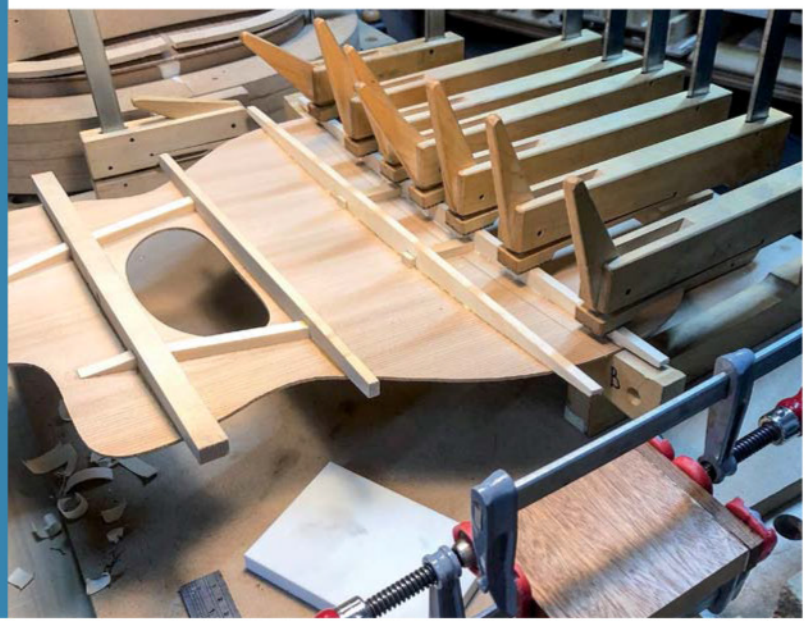

PHOTO BY ALEX BISHOP

It wasn't always like this, though. As any fans of my work would know, I've always had a penchant for pushing the boundaries of guitar design. It's always been my belief that once the considerable skills and tools have been attained, it would be a shame to only build close copies of the instruments that came before. If anything, almost all of the significant developments in guitar design originated in low-output ateliers around the world, and I feel that as independent luthiers we have a sense of duty in continuing that tradition. Among my own favourite instruments to date were the ones that most boldly challenge conventional aesthetics; striped ebony and maple fingerboards, Art Deco-inspired inlays, and unusually positioned soundholes have all been utilised to give my instruments a fresh look.

Building A Voice

But how about tone? Just like musicians, I think the hardest thing to achieve over the course of a guitar-making career is to find your own sound. I've realised that my own goal is to allow each instrument to have its own unique voice, guided by the requirements of my clients. If I can let the sound of a timber that I'm using stand out, then that is a success in my books. While two OM guitars should have the same sort of feel and ballpark tone, I aim for the differences between them to be highlighted by the different woods used, particularly the back and sides. If this is not discernible, then I call into question whether I have done everything I could to allow the instrument to breathe and vibrate to its full sonic potential. Over the past 50 instruments I've enjoyed hearing the results of an array of stunning unconventional tonewoods: pear, cypress, cedar, ebony, bog oak, padauk and cherry are just a handful that spring to mind.

However, with around 70,000 tree species globally – which includes an overwhelming number of sustainable alternatives to the traditional exotic guitar-making tonewoods – it's clear that one lifetime is not going to be enough to explore the plethora of possibilities available to small-workshop guitar makers of the future. In my woodstore I have a high, neatly stacked tonewood pile earmarked for use in future guitars. Dusty sets of curly sequoia, bear-claw Canadian Sitka spruce, yellow cedar and apple are all laying patiently, awaiting their moment of glory.

As long as there is an interest in making music and building things by hand, I know that my enjoyment in learning to build guitars will be unwavering for at least another 50 instruments. No matter what the future brings, I feel confident that the guitar will continue to be what many of us reach for, to help connect with what makes us feel human.

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Chord Vocabulary (PART 1)

Richard Barrett explains how exploring different chord voicings can help bring ease to your own arrangements and accompaniments

It's good to know as many ways as possible to play each and every chord – not only to give us options when arranging chord accompaniments, overdubs and chord melodies for solo guitar arrangements, but also to enhance our knowledge of the fretboard in a different way from learning every conceivable scale and mode. The ultimate goal is to understand chord structures enough that an arpeggio or scale is always to hand – a constant work in progress, perhaps, but isn't that at least partly what keeps us all hooked?

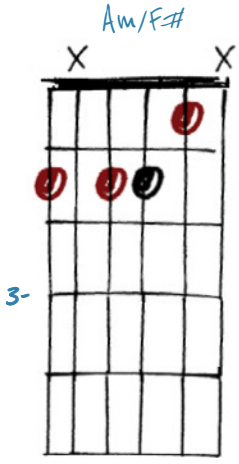
Looking at different versions of what is ostensibly the same chord/group of notes also gives some interesting insights into the conventions used when naming them – and the sometimes profound differences between adding a note at the bottom, middle or top end of a chord. I've chosen to go with the minor 6th chord in this instance: shades of Django but also frequently used as chord VII in the diatonic scale under the guise of min7♭5 or half diminished. Read on for more on this!

PHOTO BY KEVIN NIXON/CLASSIC ROCK MAGAZINE

Steve Hackett's use of alternative chord shapes is in evidence on his early Genesis work and solo material

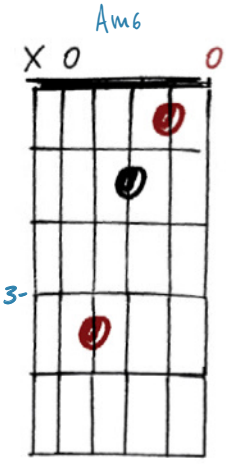
Example 1

Look at the notes present here and you'll find an Am chord over an F# bass note. The root (A) is muted as this would be 'too much information' and sound muddy against the F#. Note that this would not happen an octave higher. Am/F# would be a good name for this, though F#m7♭5 (aka half diminished) would also be correct – it depends if you resolve to an Fmaj7.



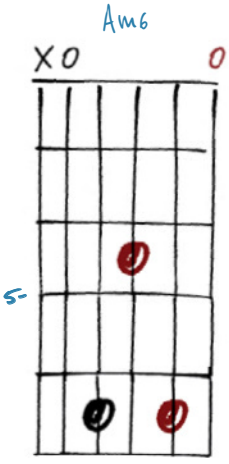
Example 2

If there's a classic case of Am6, this is it – the 6th (F#) is buried in the middle of the triad with the root (A) at the bottom. We have the 5th on the open first string, something that is very often omitted from extended chords in lower octaves.



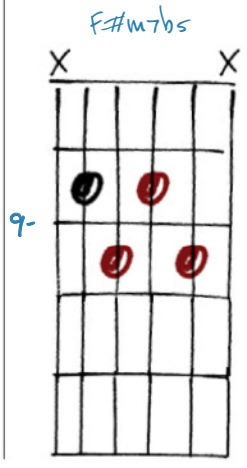
Example 3

Shades of early Genesis! This is clearly another Am6, featuring a different grouping (or 'stacking') of notes. You can see the different opportunities for phrasing or linking other chords that this different shape might provide. A Dorian mode also lives in this territory with its characteristic major 6th (rather than the ♭6 of the natural minor).



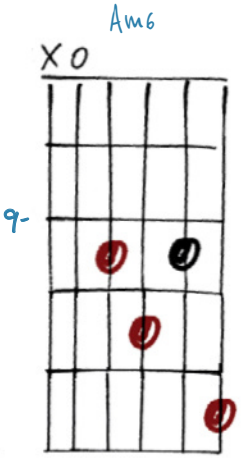
Example 4

This chord appears in most books as F#m7♭5 or F half diminished; a 'whole' diminished would require an E♭ on the third string, giving us a 'double flat' 7th in the context of the chord. Looking at the fretboard, you'll see an A minor triad over that F# bass note, so playing Am6-based inversions of lines will work.



Example 5

Very useful in a chord melody context, this voicing of Am6 has the 6th (F#) in the middle, with the root (A) on the open fifth string. However, this is only included to help the chord stand on its own. There is enough going on here harmonically to use over a bass (or another guitar) without it.



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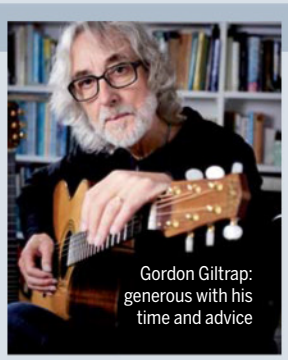
STAR LETTER

COMMUNITY SPIRIT



Gordon Giltrap: generous with his time and advice

I read with great interest Jamie Dickson's column in issue 499 regarding the encouragement he has received from fellow guitarists in recording his acoustic album. This generosity of spirit struck a chord with me as I only took up the guitar seriously during lockdown and, to be honest, at an age where achieving some level of competence rather than mastery is probably my most realistic goal.

I have, however, had the good fortune since then to make friends with a number of excellent amateur and pro guitarists, all of whom have been unfailingly supportive and generous with their time, knowledge and enthusiasm. Being able to spend time with friends whose level of ability and musicianship is beyond your pay grade really makes you up your game, and it has been a better education than any amount of YouTube videos and the like.

More importantly, the camaraderie and friendship has been an unexpected delight and has enriched my life and the experience of learning to play beyond measure. Personally, I cannot overstate how important a word of encouragement from someone you trust and whose playing you admire has been in my own development, and I'd like to say a huge thank you to these individuals if they are reading.

The guitar might be just an instrument, but it seems guitarists, as Jamie's column illustrates, are a community. Good luck with the album, Jamie, I look forward to hearing more about it in future issues.

Glenn Holman

Thanks for writing in with a letter that, on our 500th issue, really cuts to the heart of why guitar is a lifelong love for so many. How many of us have gone up to an amazing guitarist after a gig to tell them how much we enjoyed their playing? You probably mentioned you played a bit yourself, too. The kind, encouraging words you likely received in reply represent the camaraderie of guitar playing at its best: the act of sharing in something that always repays the effort we put into it – an addiction without vice, a solace in sadness and an amplifier of joy. So here's to all those small but important words of support we extend to other players, a rising tide that raises all ships.

PHOTO BY JOBY SESSIONS

VOX AMPLIFICATION LTD.

Each issue, the Star Letter will win a pair of Vox VGH AC30 guitar amplifier headphones!
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OUT OF EARSHOT?

I was interested in Ralph Morse's letter in issue 498 [Fair Hearing] as I, too, experience a harsh and distorted sound when playing with my hearing aids fitted. I am no expert in these matters, but it is probably to do with the fact that the microphones in the hearing aids are inevitably very small and designed to receive the human voice and normal everyday sounds, rather than the specific sounds of a musical instrument.

You will probably find that the harshness reduces as you move further away from the sound source, but, of course, this is not practicable when playing acoustic guitar. Assuming that you play right-handed, and that you generally look at the fretboard when playing, a non-technical approach worth trying is to remove the right hearing aid, ie, the one nearest the soundhole. This seems to reduce the harshness and is some compromise between getting a reasonable sound and hearing whatever else is going on. But the result is still somewhat disappointing compared with the actual sound of a decent-quality instrument. There is also the concern that the sound you are hearing is probably different from the sound that your audience is hearing.

It would be interesting to have the views of a suitably qualified audiologist as I am sure that there must be many others out there with impaired hearing who have similar difficulties.

John Guy

Thanks for those suggestions for Ralph to try, John – Ralph, if you're reading this, let us know if this does anything to help with your experiences with the same problem. Best of luck, fellas.

IDENTITY CRISIS

My first electric guitar, which I purchased new about 46 years ago, was an Aria LP-style [as shown in the image above right]. I always thought that it was a LP-style Gold Top Pro II. I cannot find a serial number on the guitar, only a 'Made In Japan' decal on the back of the neck. Checking on the web again I cannot find anything that matches the headstock shape or the mother-of-pearl inlays for the position markers on the neck and the face of the body.

I did read that the early Aria guitars did not all have a serial number and that, because of its age, it was most probably made in the Matsumoku factory. I hope you may be able to help me to identify exactly which model my guitar is?

Peter Simmonds

Can anyone help Peter identify the model of his rare Aria single-cut?

Thanks for sharing, Peter, that's a fine-looking, even ornate, instrument and was clearly not an entry level model back in its day. Can any readers help Peter find out more about his rare Aria? Give us a shout if you have an old catalogue to hand or similar source of info that might shed some light and we'll pass it on...

HAPPY RETURNS

Many guitarists I know talk about the one that got away or 'the one I should never have sold'. I am over the moon to report I have managed to get one of my old guitars back! I have been playing with psychedelic band Nirvana since the 80s. In 2004 we were booked to play the Felipop festival in Spain. I was worried about taking a guitar that may get damaged, so I ended up buying a cheap copy of George Harrison's Rocky guitar. It was only a copy, but after a bit of tweaking, it held its tune and sounded good. I played the guitar at the festival and it played really well.

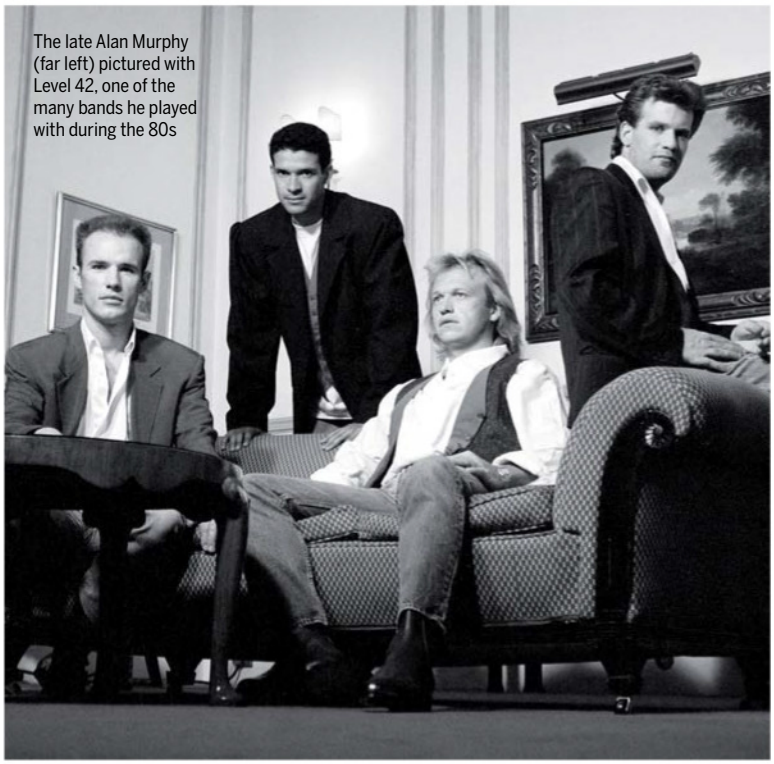
Keith Smart (above) managed to track down 'the one that got away', his George Harrison Rocky copy that he played at Spain's Felipop festival with his band in 2004

It created a lot of interest – people wanted to know if it was George Harrison's guitar.

In 2018 I sold the guitar as I had some bills to pay. This year I thought, 'I wonder if I can track it down?' I contacted the auction house that sold it and they kindly forwarded my email to the person who bought it. Turns out he owns a music shop in London and it was on display there. After some good-natured haggling, I bought the guitar and it is back with me again.

Keith Smart

Thanks for your lost-and-found story, Keith, and kudos for making it through the 90s sharing the same name as a certain moderately popular grunge band from Seattle! We often wish guitars had to be registered – much like cars or aircraft – so you could see where an instrument had been during its long life... and just maybe track down that much-missed guitar sold on a whim and regretted ever after. Glad you got your 'Rocky' replica back without any such aids, however. Have any readers got a 'guitars reunited' story to beat it? Write in to the usual address and we'll print the best.



The late Alan Murphy (far left) pictured with Level 42, one of the many bands he played with during the 80s

PHOTO BY JOHN STODDART/POPPERFOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES

MURPHY'S LORE?

The music of the 80s and the associated style of guitar is popular once again. I recently heard some Go West – a favourite of mine during my teenage years – and thought it would be great to see a feature on Alan Murphy, the guitarist with Go West, Kate Bush and Level 42. For me, he had a tone and style that personifies the guitar sound from so many 80s pop/rock songs. He used Yamaha MSG guitars, which in themselves are very cool and distinctive. How about Richard doing a Blues Headlines in the style of Alan? Not strictly blues, but it would add an 80s flavour to our blues palettes!

Dave Leask

Hi Dave, funny you should say that, we already have an Alan Murphy feature in the early stages of preparation – and Richard is going to be writing it. We'll pass on your encouragement as he tracks down some of the musicians who worked with the late, great Mr Murphy. Watch this space!

CASE CLOSED?

It's rare I get the luxury to read *Guitarist* from cover to cover, but it must have been fate that a long haul flight and the choice of *Guitarist* issue 497 coincided

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor. Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com

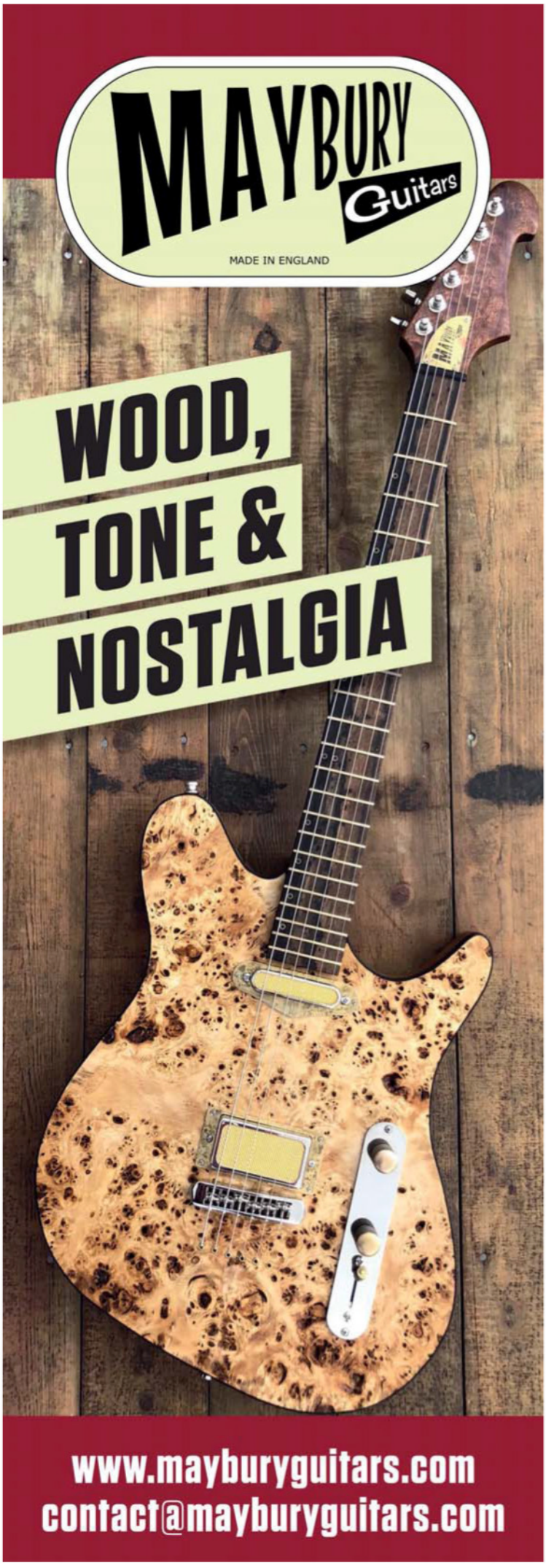
Guitar cases such as the Mono M80 series provide much more sophisticated protection than the humble 'gigbag' term may suggest

recently as reader Ant O'Neill referenced Manson's Oryx VI and its inclusion of a gigbag instead of a case in his letter 'On The Case' within that issue. While to many it might seem like a budget consideration, for Manson Guitar Works it is much more a case (sorry, had to) of thinking about the best option for the type of player the guitar may be aimed at, and budget is rarely brought into consideration.

Firstly, the "simple gigbag" in question is none less than the very heavy duty Mono M80-EG model, which has protection and features almost in line with a hard case and a price tag that, in fact, exceeds our alternative hard case offering. Our research of the type of players that would seek out an Oryx also indicated they would prefer the user-friendly nature of a great gigbag, rather than adding another case to their guitar collection. The addition of a gigbag was therefore very much a conscious decision overriding the selection of a case, rather than to reach a certain price point. We hope in due course to offer Mono gigbags across all our ranges as well as hard cases for all models so that ultimately the customer has access to every option.

Adrian Ashton, CEO, Manson Guitar Works

Thanks for writing in with those viewpoints, Adrian. Both the original letter and your detailed reply highlight that, arguably, the humble term 'gigbag' no longer accurately represents the levels of protection that high-end semi-rigid cases can offer. For example, boutique brand Wolfmeister in Australia seems to have acknowledged this by calling its high-end leather cases 'Gig Shells' instead as the shock and impact-protection offered surpasses that of many traditional hard cases. Mono's M80-EG is another good example of how we can have our cake and eat it these days, in terms of combining portability with high levels of protection. We'd certainly rather be using one than an unwieldy, rectangular wooden case as in the 'good old days'.



WIN! A Limited Edition PRS guitar

Not all PRS guitars come with figured maple tops as this very rootsy limited-edition CE 24 Satin Nitro Ltd illustrates – and this one could be yours!

PRS may be launching two new bolt-ons in this very issue (see page 82), but its original bolt-on dates back to the late 80s Classic Electric, which is still very much a part of the USA line as the CE 24. To help ease the demand during the Covid months, PRS Europe commissioned a limited run of CE 24s with an all-over satin nitro finish, the maple tops coming in five satin opaque colours: Black (as pictured), Powder Blue, Seafoam Green, Gold Top and Antique White. Another change over the standard specification is the ebony fingerboard and the return of the much-loved 57/08, the first of PRS's date-series humbuckers.

Those pretty classic-sounding 'buckers can be partially split to create some very usable single-coil voices, and alongside that satin finish you'll find a very rootsy hot-rod vibe, something that many enjoyed about those original Classic Electrics. The craft is superb, of course, as is the hardware – the cast steel vibrato and top-locking tuners create a very in-tune vibrato system – while setup and playability are first class. The Wide Thin maple neck is far from shredder-thin, with a relaxed C profile and good depth in higher positions, while the 635mm (25-inch) scale, 254mm (10-inch) 'board and PRS standard medium jumbo frets create a real halfway-house feel between the obvious classic benchmarks. Our pictured model is a good weight at 3.54kg (7.79lb), too.

The more-than-credible CE 24 still takes some beating and this limited-edition version comes in just under the standard gloss model at £2,199 (including gigbag). With its vintage voicing and workingman's vibe, it might well be one of the most rock 'n' roll guitars PRS has ever produced. **[DB]**

Closing date: 18 August 2023

Make sure you enter at *https://bit.ly/git500prs* before the closing date. Good luck!

To be in with a chance of winning this limited edition, simply answer the question below correctly on our online entry page. Good luck!

What year was the original PRS CE introduced?

A) 1987
B) 1988
C) 1989

Terms and conditions: *By taking part you agree to be bound by these terms and the competition rules at: https://www.futureplc.com/competition-rules/. The opening date for entries is 00:00 (UK Time) on 17 June 2023 and will close at 23:59 (UK Time) on 18 August 2023. The competition is free to enter and entries must be submitted via http://bit.ly/git500prs. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Entries are limited to one per individual. Open to all UK residents aged 18 and over, except employees of Future Publishing Limited ("Future"), PRS Europe ("Sponsor") and any party involved in the competition. There will be one (1) winner entitled to the featured guitar provided by the Sponsor and selected at random. The winners will be randomly drawn from all valid entries received and shall be notified by Future by email or telephone within 14 days of the closing date. Upon notification the winners will be required to supply details of a UK delivery address. If a winner has not responded after 2 weeks of being notified that they are a winner, an alternative winner will be drawn. The prize is non-transferable and non-refundable. There is no cash alternative.*

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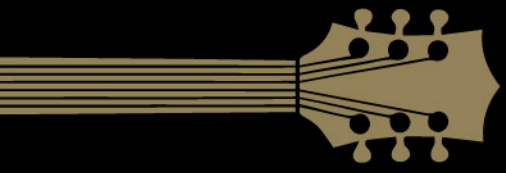
Guitarist
ESTABLISHED
1984

500 issues

THE MUSIC OF TIME

As we celebrate the incredible landmark of publishing 500 issues of *Guitarist*, esteemed editors of our tome, past and present, share their favourite – and sometimes most embarrassing – memories of working for the magazine



JAMIE DICKSON (2011-PRESENT)

"My first memory of *Guitarist* magazine comes from the day I bought my first guitar. I was 16 and I'd started working in a local gardening centre. I'd just received my first pay packet of £75 and I couldn't decide what to spend it on; I thought either a Walkman or a guitar. So I walked into Morlings music shop in Lowestoft with my pay and walked out again with a Hohner Dreadnought – and that one decision changed the course of the rest of my life. The second thing I bought that day was a copy of *Guitarist* , so I could find out what to do with my new Hohner. I remember Slash was on the front cover and, digging around in subsequent years, I think it would have been around 1992.

"Fast forward to 2011 and I found myself actually getting a job at the magazine I'd read and loved for years. It was a real pinch-yourself moment and one I've never forgotten. It was a privilege then and it remains so today. One of my first big assignments I received, as a features editor, was to interview BB King backstage at the Albert Hall during an all-star celebration of (if memory serves) his 86th birthday. I had been granted only 10 minutes' interview time to get the cover feature and, having been ushered into the great bluesman's dressing room and been introduced, I was a little alarmed when he began with quite a long recital of the story of how his guitar Lucille came to get its name. It was wonderful to hear him tell it in person, but I knew this story had been told many times before.

"But to my delight, BB then told me about how listening to the wavering sound of Hawaiian guitar players on the radio influenced his trademark vibrato as a blues player – he also recalled being scolded for touching a preacher's guitar as a very young boy, a moment that somehow began a love affair with the instrument that, through his huge talent, gave the world so much incredible music. As the short interview drew to a close, I said goodbye and, on cloud nine, left the dressing room carrying one of our photographer's light stands – and narrowly avoided lamping (literally) Slash in the head with it as he walked briskly past the dressing room door. Talk about going from hero to zero – or very nearly.

The cover of the first issue of *Guitarist* that Jamie bought in 1992, with man-of-the-hour Slash front and centre

"Since then there have been so many memorable moments meeting musicians I've admired my whole life. But I'm deeply conscious this privilege is only extended to me in order to bring readers of this magazine closer to that moment, to that musician, through the stories we publish. As such, while it is an honour to be the actual person in the room, it's you – the readers of *Guitarist* – who make it all possible. I'd like to express my enduring gratitude to you for that support, as we literally wouldn't be able to do this without you. I hope we've repaid your support by helping you feel like you've spent time with your guitar heroes in these pages.

> *"On cloud nine, I left the dressing room carrying one of our photographer's light stands – and narrowly avoided lamping Slash in the head"* JAMIE DICKSON

"So, what moment has made me proudest, working at *Guitarist*? Well, for the reasons outlined above, I'm going to set aside things like interviews – no matter how personally gratifying – that are really just part of my job. Which leaves me with one memory to treasure in particular. In 2018, myself, Nev Marten and Mick Taylor were invited to perform Hendrix's first album at the Bristol Blues Festival. While we were never going to reach Jimi's epic heights on guitar, we gave it all we had in a performance to a sold-out auditorium. It was a memory to treasure because my mother and father were in the audience and I remember my dad coming up afterwards and saying he was proud of me – you don't forget those things, no matter what age you are. We all went and had a meal afterwards and the moment became a special memory. My dad died a year later. So I'm going to name that as my favourite moment from my privileged time working here – three editors, past and present, performing music we loved for people we loved."

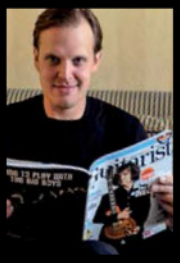
Coincidentally, Jamie's interview with blues legend BB King almost ended in a head-on collision with... Slash

MICK TAYLOR (1997-2013)

"So. Many. Memories. Meeting your heroes goes without saying, not least the staff of the mag – then headed up by Neville – on a rainy February day in 1997. It started with endless copy subbing, to eventually being let off the leash as a nervous newbie writer somewhat agog at a stream of seasoned pro players. The failing tape machines; picking up the phone to David Gilmour and not believing it was him; playing Brad Paisley's guitar on stage; hanging out in Joe Bonamassa's apartment; talking at length with Randall Smith, Paul Reed Smith, Bill Collings; Peter Green, Les Paul... titan after titan offering endless golden nuggets of insight and learning. The primary task remains translating those interactions via words and images, but the secondary effect is the profundity with which it shapes us personally.

"And then there are the guitars. Oh the guitars... and the amps and the pedals and yet more guitars. A never-ending stream of jaw-dropping instruments about which you were required to form some objective opinion. I'm still not sure it's possible.

"Above all else, though, what replaces any single memory are two realisations that continue to grow in significance. The first is the inspirational talent and commitment of the people who never got a byline, but who made – and continue to make – *Guitarist* happen day-to-day. You taught me what better looks like, and to never stop chasing it. Secondly, it's the camaraderie and shared passion created by this bizarre amalgam of wood and metal. As my brother-in-tone Daniel says, 'It's a lot to have in common with someone,' and that it is. To have been part of that as steward of the best guitar magazine in the world is a privilege that remains as amazing as it was unlikely. Happy 500th *Guitarist*. I will always love you."



Joe Bonamassa enjoying some light reading during Mick's visit to Los Angeles

"What replaces any single memory is the camaraderie and shared passion created by this bizarre amalgam of wood and metal" MICK TAYLOR

Brad Paisley letting rip with his eponymously finished Tele. Jamming with Brad's guitar on stage was a memorable treat for Mick Taylor

DAVID MEAD (1992-'96; 2015-PRESENT)

"Memories from my time as *Guitarist* editor in the mid-90s are many and varied and it's difficult to single out just one. Previously, as features editor, my first serious mission had been to interview Steve Vai at the Cannes Guitar Festival in May '93 where I was treated like a lord and chauffeur-driven everywhere. I actually had to plead with the organisers to let me walk to Vai's hotel to do the interview so that I could enjoy just a little of the South of France sunshine. We became so engrossed in our conversation that I nearly missed my flight home, Steve giving me a lift back to my hotel to pick up my things just in time to be chauffeured back to Nice Airport.

"Being asked to write the liner notes for Gary Moore's *Blues For Greeny* album was certainly a highlight of my tenure in the editor's chair. I was invited up to Sarm West studios to hear a rough mix of the album and while I was there I had a few words with Gary and noticed that Greeny was on a stand in the main studio. I asked if I could have a quick play and Gary said, 'Sure.' I remember it being very light and incredibly resonant, and I was in total awe of its historical significance.

"I've been incredibly fortunate to spend time with many of my favourite guitarists: having a coffee with Eric Clapton at Olympic Studios in 1994 (and playing 'Blackie' afterwards), being given a tour around Air Studios by Mark Knopfler and a private lesson on how to play *Romeo And Juliet* on his famous resonator. Other unforgettables include spending 24 hours with Pink Floyd on tour in Strasbourg, and an hour-long phone call talking to Frank Zappa... Thanks, *Guitarist*!"

David's highly successful tenure as editor in the 90s meant he got to interview Clapton and other titans of the stadium rock era – while sporting the suitably moody byline pic above!

PHOTO BY BRIAN RASIC/GETTY IMAGES

DAVE BURRLUCK (2000-PRESENT)

"Unlike my illustrious colleagues' stories of derring-do with some of the greatest guitar players ever, I'm more likely to have been shown the tradesman's entrance. Dispatched many more times than I can remember to visit factories all over the world, I'm invariably covered in sawdust, not glitter. But, to be honest, I've always felt more at home talking timbers, glue and production techniques with the likes of Bob Taylor, Joe Knaggs and countless others. That's my schooling.

"It certainly hasn't all been plain sailing and free lunches. Crossing the border from the USA into Mexico on a press trip to Fender's Ensenada factory, where our passports were scrutinised by big staff with bigger guns, was unsettling, to say the least. And having our car searched for bombs every morning as we left the hotel compound in Jakarta makes you wonder if your factory trip was really necessary.

"It can be an eye-opening and humbling experience, too. Visiting a sizable factory in China is one experience I won't forget. Staffed by young workers who really should have been in college but lived miles from their homes in dormitories on-site, I realised my bulky DSLR and lenses cost more than any of the staff earned in a year. I never travelled with that kit again and have always had immense respect for these ordinary people making guitars we can actually afford.

"On a quick trip to Annapolis, Maryland, to interview Paul Reed Smith I was told we were going to the White House so I'd better pack a suit. When Paul and his driver, Church, arrived to pick me up it was swiftly decided that said suit was a bit too Dr Feelgood. We drove to Paul's house where he and Church dressed me in one of Paul's outfits, which, as Paul is a fair bit taller than me, didn't exactly fit. Now late, we headed off to Washington and hit traffic: 'Let's do the interview now,' suggests Paul. I got my story and got to see George Bush announce the end of the war in Iraq. If only I was making this up..."

A trip to Yamaha Music Manufacturing Indonesia in Jakarta (above left) is up there in Dave's lasting memories

Nev (above right) and David (second right) in full flight during a jam with Gary Moore and Bernie Marsden in summer 2000

NEVILLE MARTEN (1986-'93; 1996-PRESENT)

"I have millions of great *Guitarist* memories. Playing Clapton's 'Blackie' and 'Brownie', David Gilmour's white 0001 Strat or Brian May's Red Special, Jimi's 'Woodstock' Strat, or playing on stage with Gary Moore. Then there were fantastic work trips all over the world to incredible places. But while these all stand out, I recall certain things that didn't quite go to plan, just as readily as those that did.

"One biggie was in 2006 when I went to interview Mike McCartney about his new book *Live8 Coolpix*, where brother Paul had invited him backstage to take candid shots of the artists that performed at the festival. I drove to Liverpool for the lunchtime launch and was due to interview Mike afterwards. I heard that Paul was in town and it was rumoured he might attend. He didn't. I believe someone also mentioned they were leaving for Las Vegas the next day for the opening of *The Beatles Love: Cirque du Soleil* show.

"After the interview, Mike invited me to dinner with the family; I politely declined. Had I just turned down dinner with Paul McCartney?" NEVILLE MARTEN

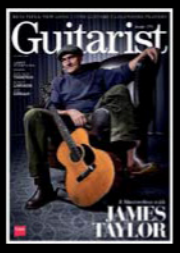
Paul McCartney during the Wings era with his brother Mike. Did Neville miss out on a once-in-a-lifetime invitation to dine and reminisce with Macca?

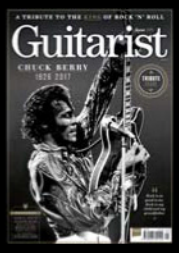
"Mike had other interviews to do and mine kept getting pushed back. About three hours later we were sitting on the floor of an empty radio studio, having our chat. We got on really well and had common friends, like guitarist Joe Brown (before The Beatles broke, they'd supported him; Mike told me he'd snapped a picture of George as he sneakily picked up Joe's Gibson ES-345).

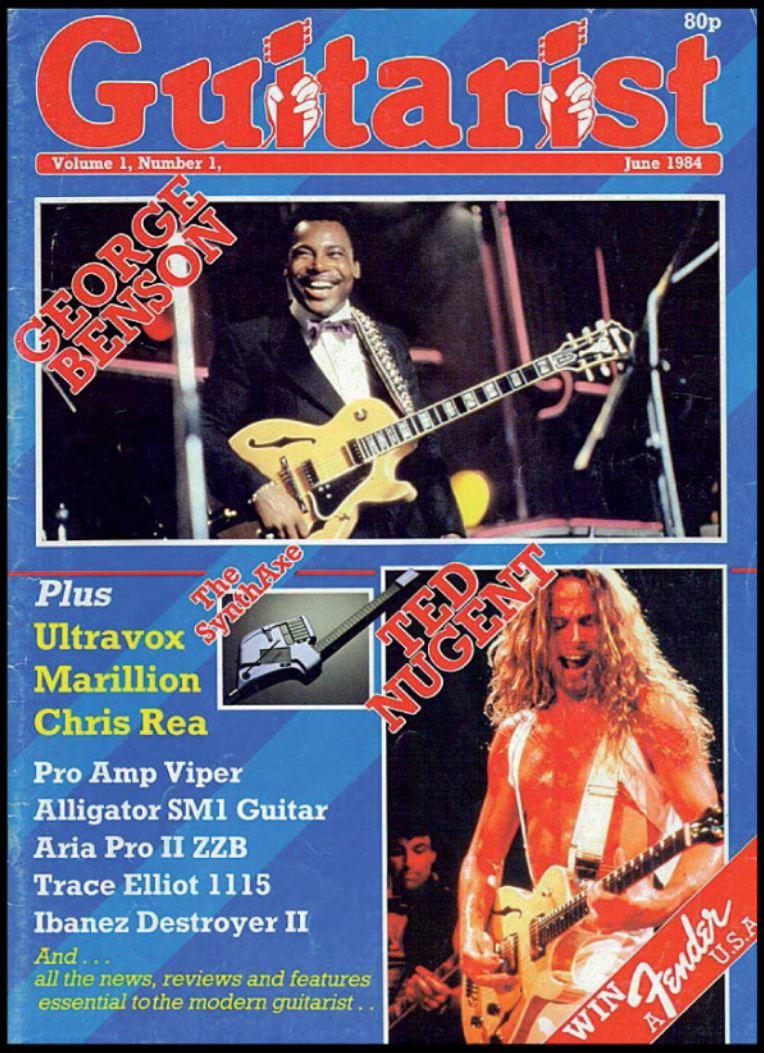
"After the interview Mike said something like, 'Neville, I feel you've been messed about today. Why don't you come to dinner with the family?' Since I faced a three-and-a-half-hour trek home I politely declined. On the long drive out of Liverpool it suddenly dawned, 'The family... you absolute moron! Have you just turned down dinner with Paul McCartney?'

"Now, I have absolutely no idea if that's what *was* going to happen, but if it was, it's safe to say I goofed!"

MCCARTNEY PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES







The very first issue of *Guitarist* featured George Benson on the cover and looked forward to the revolution in tone that the SynthAxe seemed to promise back in the heady days of the 80s...

Former editor Eddie Allen has vivid memories of interviewing Gary Moore on tour in the 80s, recalling the jack-of-all trades skills needed to photograph, design and write up features

"One interview for 'Guitarist' will always stand out: Spinal Tap's Nigel Tufnel. An absolute gentleman and as mad as a box of frogs" EDDIE ALLEN

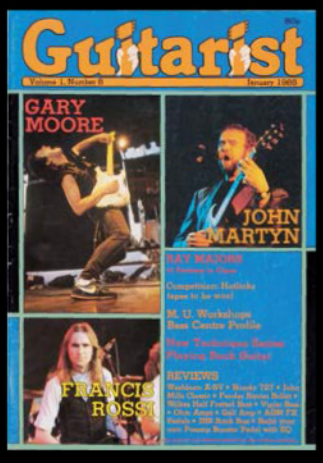
EDDIE ALLEN (1984-1996)

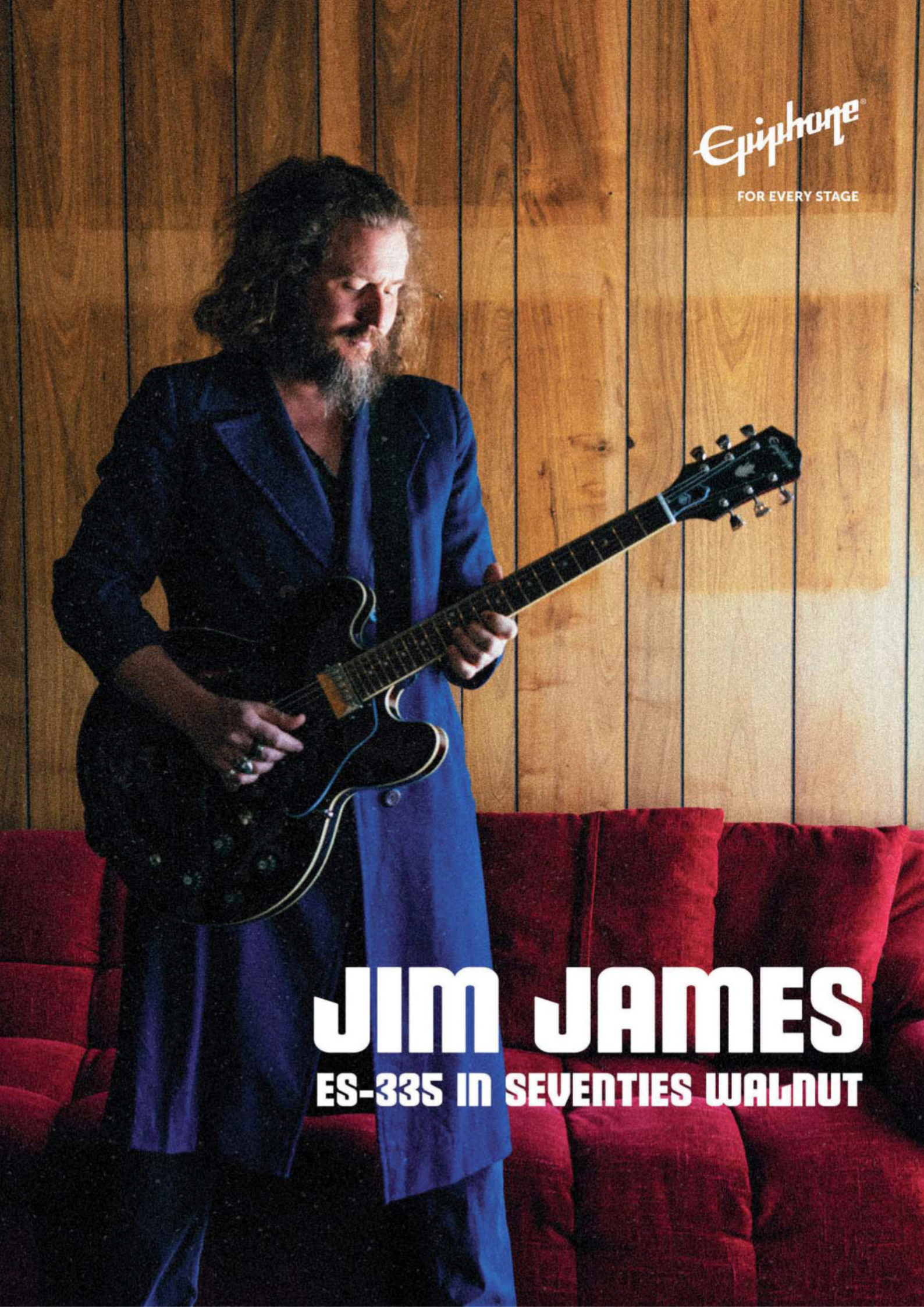
"Following a chance meeting in 1984 with an old friend I was invited to meet a publisher who was about to launch a new magazine aimed exclusively at guitarists. At that meeting I accepted his offer to be involved, and *Guitarist* was launched. By the November 1985 issue, featuring Gary Moore, I was designing front covers (mine had a Flying V in the strapline), riding on a tour bus with Gary and his band, and taking photographs for publication in the magazine – including the cover picture. Necessity meant we learnt quickly to become multi-skilled in those days.

"Then joining the editorial team with their ability to engage with artists, equipment manufacturers and distributors alike, coupled with their musicality, enthusiasm and knowledge for all things guitar-related, I hope helped in *Guitarist*'s transition from a magazine written by enthusiastic amateurs to a world-leading international publication.

"I eventually became editor, and in the 12 years I was involved with *Guitarist* we literally covered a lot of ground, reviewing gear and interviewing artists. During that time just about every major player featured in its pages, as did all the latest gear. I've lost count of the amount of equipment reviews and artist interviews I did, but there is one that will always stand out: Spinal Tap's Nigel Tufnel. An absolute gentleman and as mad as a box of frogs. But the night spent talking with Heart's Nancy Wilson or the morning spent in Lita Ford's hotel room both come a close second.

"Working on *Guitarist* magazine from day one was an adventure. Actually, it was like being in a musical episode of *Minder*, starring the great and the good from all parts of the music industry. Personally, being a part of the first 12 years of *Guitarist*'s 500 issues was amazing. Here's to the next 500." G




Epiphone
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THE Guitarist INTERVIEW

CAROL KAYE

If you've ever wondered what connects Frank Zappa to Frank Sinatra, Burt Bacharach to The Beach Boys or Ray Charles to The Righteous Brothers, the answer is simple: Carol Kaye. We discover the story behind the legendary bassist's iconic sound

Words Denny Ilett

If plucking a ripe plum from a tree had a sound, it would resemble Carol Kaye's signature tone – a tone that made her a 'first-call' bassist in the highly competitive studio session world. It wasn't just that, though. Kaye is arguably the first bassist to exploit the instrument in a truly melodic fashion, a nod perhaps to her early days as a jazz guitar prodigy. Her ability to invent memorable and influential bass and guitar parts on the spot in a high-pressure situation took her to – and kept her at – the very top of the studio scene and onto more than 10,000 recordings.

Carol Kaye was born into a musical family in Washington state on the Pacific Northwest in 1935, with both parents professional musicians. In 1942, they relocated to California and by the age of 13, she took possession of her first guitar. Incredibly, within a year she was proficient enough to take on students of her own alongside playing gigs in the local jazz clubs.

"I turned professional in 1948 after working with a fine jazz guitar teacher on the West Coast," Carol says. "Within a few months I'd learned enough to be out playing jazz gigs. Almost everyone in those days had a musical instrument. If you think of how many people today have cell phones and computers, that's how many people had instruments and how popular music was then. You heard *real* music everywhere: on the radio, TV and in the movies."

The Jazz Scene

In the 1950s Carol worked for the jazz saxophonist Teddy Edwards. While in his band, she came to the attention of producer Robert 'Bumps' Blackwell who is best remembered for producing and co-writing with Little Richard on a string of rock 'n' roll classics such as *Tutti Frutti*, *Long Tall Sally* and *Good Golly, Miss Molly*.

"I was asked by Bumps Blackwell to do some studio sessions for him," Carol tells us. "I was working at the Beverly Cavern in LA at the time with Teddy Edwards and Bumps loved the way I soloed *real* jazz guitar. Everyone worked at the Cavern, but I played in dozens of jazz clubs with lots of different bands. I was one of the few, in late-50s LA, that was esteemed for playing fine jazz guitar. In those days I played a secondhand Gibson ES-175 and a Gibson amp but traded it for an Epiphone Emperor. By the way, my Epiphone was Phil Spector's favourite guitar sound; he loved that guitar. Around 1957 I swapped the Gibson amp for a Fender Super Reverb, which had an open back and four 10-inch speakers. I continued to use that amp even when I switched to bass in the early 60s."

The song that Blackwell invited Carol to play on happened to be Sam Cooke's classic version of the jazz standard *Summertime*. The track is underpinned by Kaye's simple yet highly effective acoustic arpeggios on what sounds like her Emperor archtop. The A-side *You Send Me* went to No 1 on the American R&B chart and, later, into the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame as one of the 500 'Most Important Songs' list.

"From then on I decided to focus more on studio work," says Carol. "It paid 10 times more than the jazz clubs paid and, by then, I had two children and a mother to support!"

Creating A Feeling

In 1958 Carol played rhythm guitar on Ritchie Valen's million-seller *La Bamba* at Gold Star Studios in Hollywood. Phil Spector, a regular client of Gold Star, noticed what Kaye was capable of and wasted no time hiring her for his own sessions. Ultimately, these sessions generated such 'Wall Of Sound' masterpieces as The Crystals' *Then He Kissed Me* and *You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'* by The Righteous Brothers, among many others.

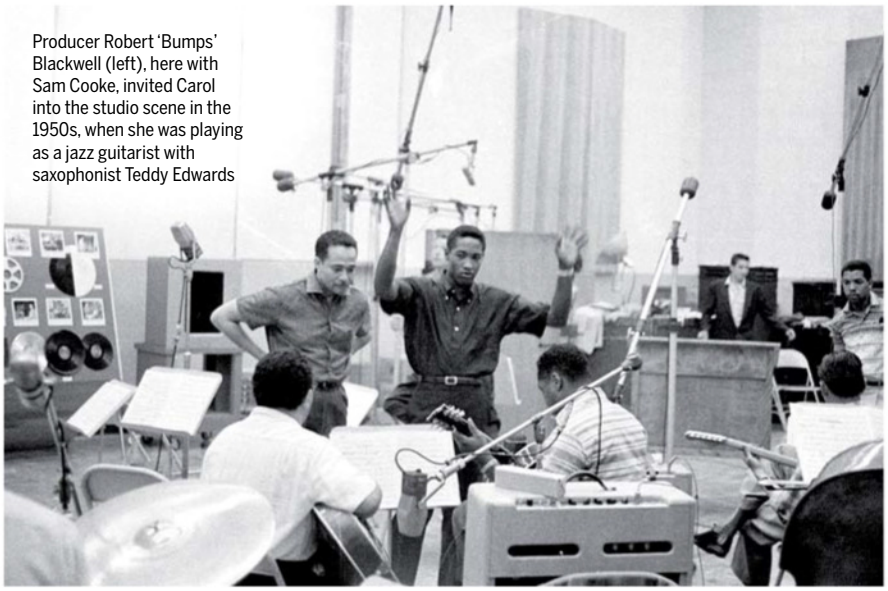
PHOTO BY JIM STEINFELDT/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

One of the busiest session players of her generation, Carol Kaye lays down the bass in an LA studio

PHOTO BY GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGE

Carol shares her experience of the sessions: "There was so much echo in the earphones on *Lovin' Feelin'* that no-one was playing well together. I had to bear down extra hard on my Epiphone, grinding away with rhythmic eighth notes, trying to congeal the rhythm together. Phil heard that and liked it so much he put a double-time echo on it, making it sound like I was playing 16th notes. It worked! We knew that was going to be a big hit. The tune was great and The Righteous Brothers were knocking our blocks off with the way they were singing. We'd never heard white singers sing like that before."

Having to adapt to whatever the session might throw their way, these studio giants had to be able to sight-read sheet music as well as be top-drawer improvisers, well accustomed to adapting to those times when they'd merely be given a chord chart.



Producer Robert 'Bumps' Blackwell (left), here with Sam Cooke, invited Carol into the studio scene in the 1950s, when she was playing as a jazz guitarist with saxophonist Teddy Edwards

PHOTO BY JESS RAND/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

•

"Some people want to see the bass as a masculine thing, but when you hear a bass played with balls… that's me!"

•

"Studio time was *very* expensive in those days. You'd have to record three or four tunes in three hours. We'd never heard the music before and had to be able to invent our lines and make sure the music sounded good. If you didn't, you never got hired again. It was that simple!" Carol states. "The producers were there to make hit records and they booked the musicians that could deliver musically as well as be ultra professional on the record date.

"We would play several of these sessions every day! You drank a *lot* of coffee to stay awake, especially on those six-hour sessions where you'd have to first invent then record a whole album. Yes, it was boring a lot of the time, but you took care of business. There were no drugs or booze allowed in the studios. Anyone turning up drunk or high would never get another session. The drugs started to turn up in the 70s and that's when most of us quit the studio scene and started to concentrate more on movie work."

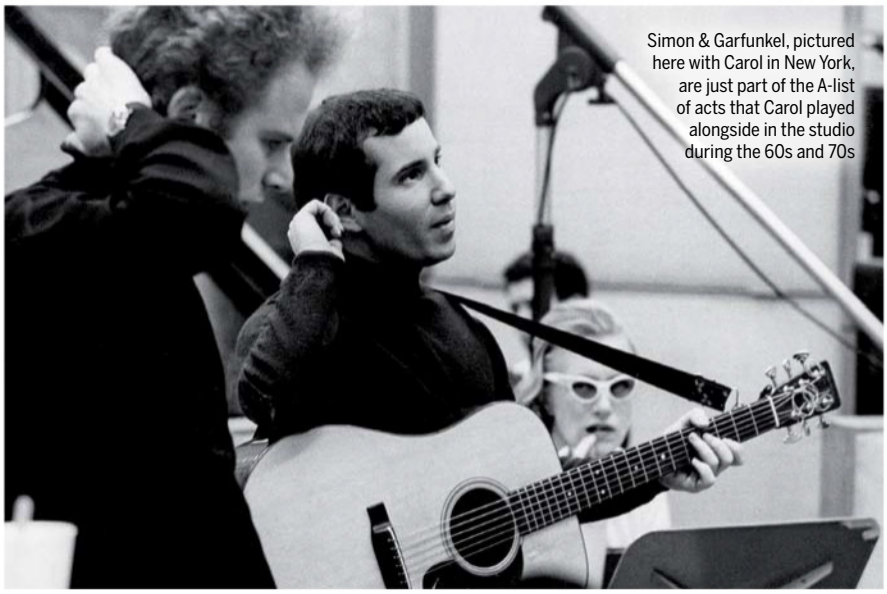
From Tedesco To Burrell

The list of musicians who Carol worked with on sessions is intriguing. The vast majority were jazz players who'd grown up through the big-band era or were touring jazz clubs across the States before settling for the relative comfort of the studio scene. Joe Pass, Barney Kessel, Howard Roberts, Tommy Tedesco and Kenny Burrell were just some of the heavyweight guitarists Kaye regularly played with on studio dates.

"People don't realise this fact: *all* of those 60s pop records were played by jazz musicians! The guys on the album covers, bar the singers, didn't record their own parts; we did them. We were the only ones who had the reading and improvising skills to handle the pressure of those sessions. It wasn't until the 70s that the rockers were good enough to play their own parts on record – and, even then, they couldn't do it in the short time we did. By then, bands were taking months to make an album that used to take us a few hours."

Carol's list of credits through the 60s and into the 70s is a veritable who's-who of top-level recording artists of the day: Ike and Tina, The Beach Boys, Simon & Garfunkel, Sinatra, Sonny and Cher, Neil Young, The Monkees, to name just a few. By this time, Carol had switched to playing a Fender Precision bass through her Super Reverb guitar amp.

"I was in my sixth year as a studio guitarist when, one day in 1963, the bass player didn't show up at a session. The producer asked me if I could play bass and I found it was a lot more fun to play and created good, interesting lines, [rather than] playing all those rinky-dink silly parts on guitar that we all had to dumb-down for on those rock and pop records. I found that my Fender Precision strung with flat-wounds and played with a pick created the sound all the producers wanted. I stuck a piece of foam on the bridge to stop those horrible overtones, which also produced a slightly muted effect that became really popular for hit records.



Simon & Garfunkel, pictured here with Carol in New York, are just part of the A-list of acts that Carol played alongside in the studio during the 60s and 70s

PHOTO BY COLUMBIA RECORDS/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Pictured here in the 60s with Tommy Tedesco (centre) in LA, Carol is largely known for bass guitar, yet her work and expertise spanned electric, acoustic and baritone guitars, as well as mandolin and banjo

PHOTO BY GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS

"People don't realise this fact: all of those 60s pop records were played by jazz musicians!"

Carol Kaye and Bill Pittman in a still from the 2008 documentary *The Wrecking Crew!*, which profiled the peerless sessioneers of the 60s and 70s

PHOTO BY GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS

"Having been a jazz guitarist it was easy for me to invent basslines for those records. Us jazz musicians hated the bulk of the pop records we played on, but I liked some of it – [such as] the more creative stuff like The Beach Boys. Brian Wilson was the only pop composer that wrote basslines for me and they were very good, but the rest I had to make up on the spot."

The male-dominated world of the 60s studio scene could be intimidating for women but not for Carol Kaye, who was far from being just a girl who played bass; she was the best bassist in the business. Quincy Jones wouldn't do a session until Carol was available and Brian Wilson called her "the best bassist in the world and way ahead of her time".

Carol recalls: "There were always women who worked with men in the jazz groups and big bands going back to the 1920s, but there were very few women in the studios – just a few who played in string sections or on harp. You know, a note doesn't have sex attached to it. You either play it good or you don't. Some people can't handle that, especially men. They want to see the bass as a masculine thing, but when you hear a bass played with balls... that's me!"

Levelling The Score

As the 70s progressed, things began to change in the studios and many of the top session artists were leaving the scene. Carol continued to record for film composers such as Lalo Schifrin (*Mission: Impossible*) and Henry Mancini (*Pink Panther*) alongside laying down bass parts for TV shows such as *M*A*S*H*, *Hawaii Five-0*, *Ironside*, *Kojak* and, appropriately, *Wonder Woman*. Carol released a series of guitar and bass tuition books to complement her growing teaching commitments and contributed to such movie scores as *Bullitt*, *Planet Of The Apes* and *Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid*.

> *"Today people are fighting for credits, they're fighting for 'me, me, me!' We didn't think like that, we thought 'us, us, us'"*

"You had one take to get your parts right on those movie sessions," says Carol. "The money people weren't into wasting time repeating things you should've got right first time. It was no pressure, though. We knew what we were doing and we were thrilled to work with some of the greatest film composers of all time.

"Apart from movies and TV shows, I quit the studio scene and went back to playing jazz. I'd missed it so much. I'd been playing so much eighth- and 16th-note basslines that I'd started losing my jazz chops. I had all kinds of guitars for the studios: electric, acoustic six- and 12-strings, even mandolin, banjo and a Danelectro baritone guitar. You had them all in the trunk of your car along with your Fender amp with spares for all. I never had time to change my strings. Every two years I'd go to the store and buy a new bass and that would be my new strings! After all those years I was happy to be back playing jazz in the clubs and at festivals, writing my books and helping people with music, spreading the truth to hopefully get rid of all the ego-driven BS out there."

To have played on so many iconic record sessions without a name-check might irk many musicians these days, but Carol Kaye is quick to point out that the studio scene wasn't like that then. The studio musicians played each session knowing they would not be credited for their work on any album sleeves and didn't expect to be. All egos had to be left in the parking lot, and from the moment the tape started rolling, it was business as usual.

"Today people are fighting for credits, they're fighting for 'me, me, me!' We didn't think like that, we thought 'us, us, us.' As a group, we were just trying to create a product, we did our best to turn those things into hits and we had a lot of success with that attitude. Music is, after all, a business and if more musicians thought that way, we would have a damn good business." G

Carol Kaye's series of tutor books and her 502-page autobiography, *Studio Musician*, are available at **https://carolkaye.com**

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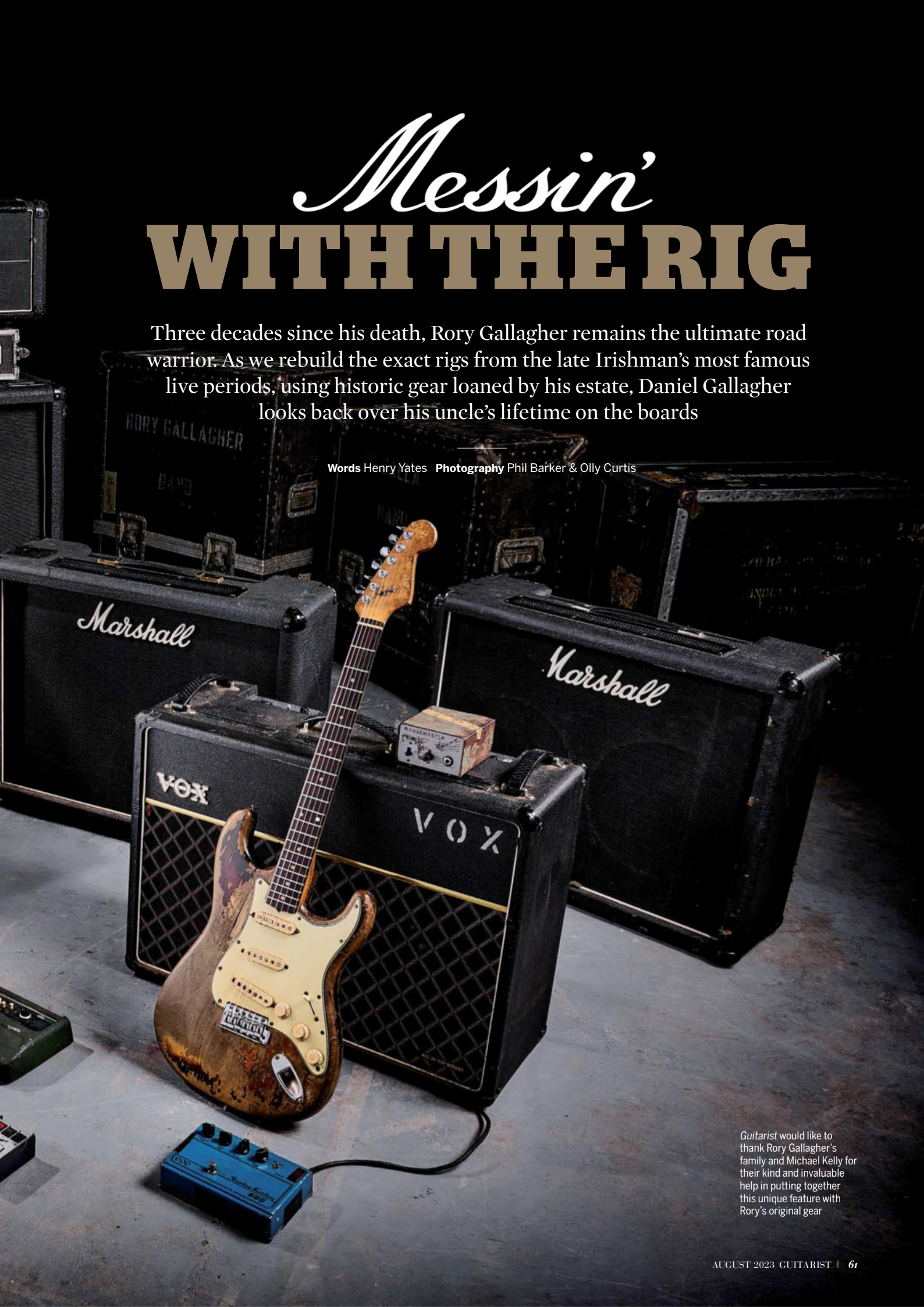
Messin' WITH THE RIG

Three decades since his death, Rory Gallagher remains the ultimate road warrior. As we rebuild the exact rigs from the late Irishman's most famous live periods, using historic gear loaned by his estate, Daniel Gallagher looks back over his uncle's lifetime on the boards

Words Henry Yates **Photography** Phil Barker & Olly Curtis



Guitarist would like to thank Rory Gallagher's family and Michael Kelly for their kind and invaluable help in putting together this unique feature with Rory's original gear

You only had to glance at Rory Gallagher to know the road was his natural habitat. The rumpled check shirt, the three-day stubble, the air of nomadic bliss: everything suggested a twilight creature to be spotted at the stage door, gas station and bolthole motel. As Joe Bonamassa once told this writer: "Rory was the guy who would pour out of the van after he drove for 17 hours, set up his own amp, plug in, play the best show you'd ever seen in your life, pick up his amp and guitar, get back in the van and drive to the next city."

As Rory's nephew – and the producer of his posthumous releases, including *All Around Man*, a new cut-and-shut of two fierce London shows played in December 1990 – Daniel Gallagher knows better than most what it meant to his uncle to take the stage. And as he unboxes the fabled guitars, amps and pedals that have largely lain dormant since Rory passed in June 1995, Daniel recalls the startling gearshift from the gentle, shaggy-haired relative to the febrile showman flaying the last of the paint from his '61 Strat.

> "Rory came alive on stage, or certainly that alter ego he had. He was such a shy, quiet guy, but then he became an animal"
> *Daniel Gallagher*

"I think that Rory came alive on stage, or certainly that alter ego he had. He was such a shy, quiet guy but then he became this animal. I knew him well as a kid, and I remember seeing him live for the first time at the Hammersmith Odeon in '87. My dad pulled back the curtain at the side of the stage, Rory was already playing and I remember thinking, 'That's him?' It was surreal knowing him from playing football in the back garden to this guy machine-gunning the crowd and going crazy."

If the road suited Rory's temperament – "It's my reason for living," he once said – it also brought out his best as a player. Certainly, there is abundant gold in Gallagher's 11-strong studio catalogue. But the impression endures that this restless road warrior viewed the studio as merely an echo of the intensity of live gigs. As mid-70s keyboard player Lou Martin once noted: "Rory wasn't at his most comfortable or happiest in the studio. If he didn't have somebody to look at then he couldn't feed off the energy."

There's no doubt Gallagher tapped his mojo most readily on the boards. Even if you never saw him live, the evidence is there on 1972's *Live In Europe*, *Irish Tour '74* and 1980's *Stage Struck*: all three widely viewed as some of the best live albums ever. "Rory's passion was always seen on stage more," says Daniel. "I remember Johnny Marr saying he was scared of him, the first time he saw Rory live, because he was so aggressive. People say that in the audience at a Rory concert, especially in the 70s, you got so caught up with how much he put into it that you ended up sweating bucketloads as well."

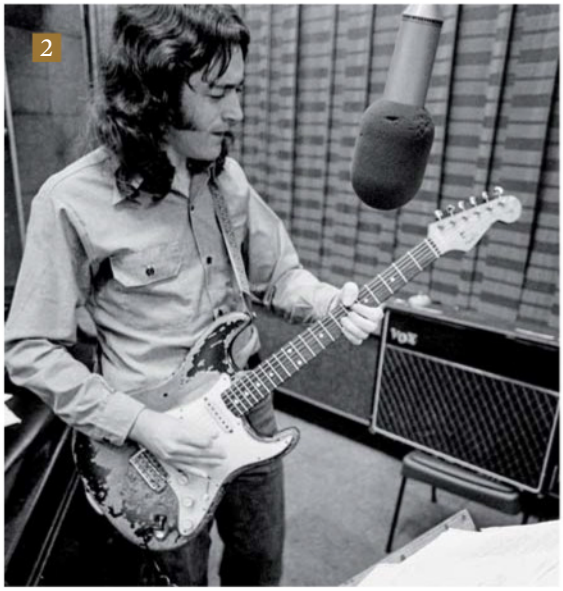
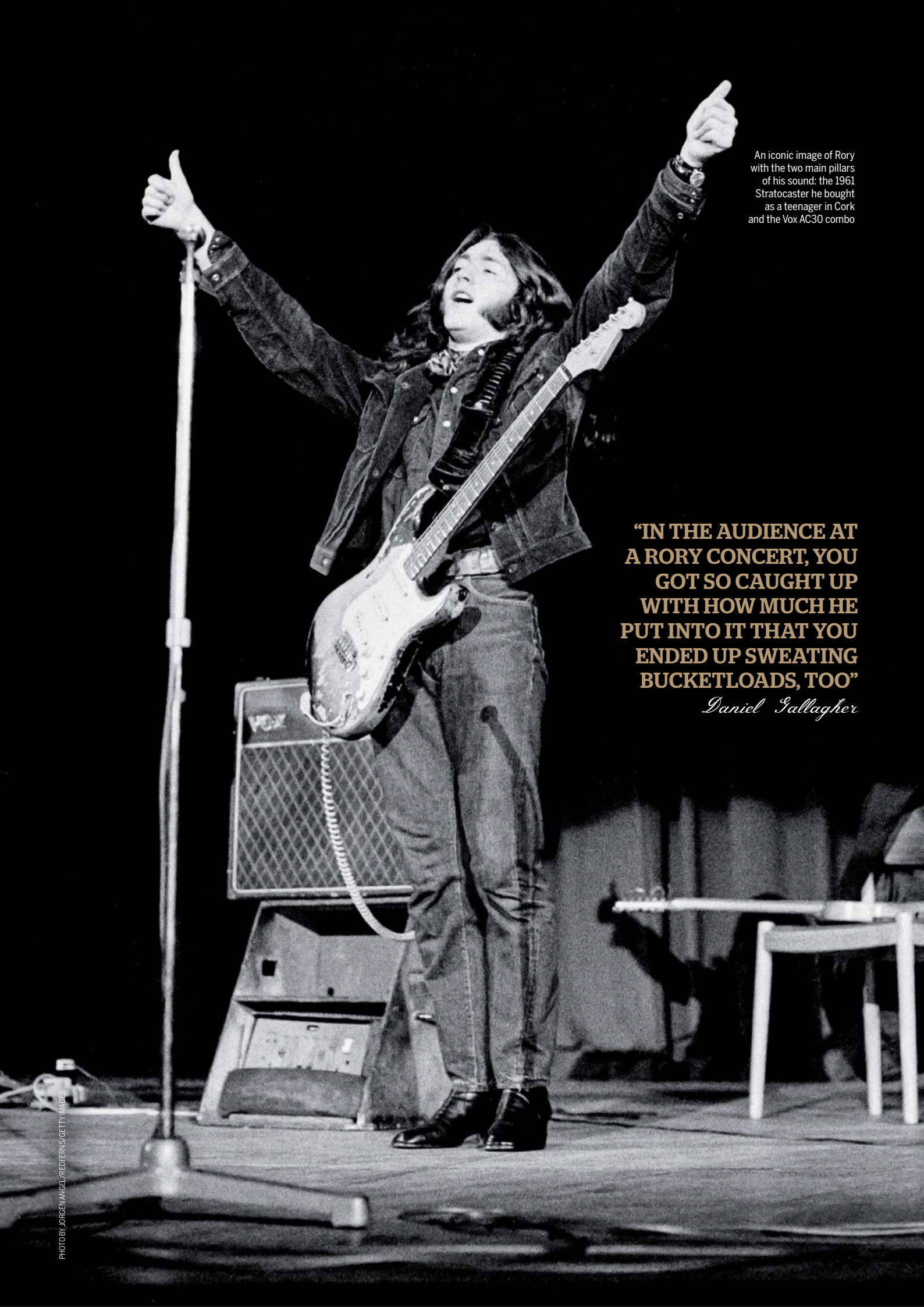


PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

2. Rory in the studio in late 1972, likely during recording sessions for his February 1973 album, *Blueprint*. Rory often strove to capture a live feel in the studio, believing that to be the essence of his musical style

PHOTO BY GÜNTER ZINT/K&K ULF KRUGER OHG/REDFERNS

1. Rory with Richard McCracken (on bass) and John Wilson (drums) in the second line-up of Taste, the band in which Rory first rose to international fame. The Vox AC30 and Rangemaster treble boost were integral to the band's raw, power-trio sound



An iconic image of Rory with the two main pillars of his sound: the 1961 Stratocaster he bought as a teenager in Cork and the Vox AC30 combo

"IN THE AUDIENCE AT A RORY CONCERT, YOU GOT SO CAUGHT UP WITH HOW MUCH HE PUT INTO IT THAT YOU ENDED UP SWEATING BUCKETLOADS, TOO"

Daniel Gallagher

PHOTO BY JORGEN ANGEL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

GALLAGHER'S GEAR

Unless you knew better, you might imagine Rory's instrument and backline choices would be as relaxed as his wardrobe and demeanour, that he would plug in whatever was to hand and make it sing. But that notion evaporates as Daniel unloads the late guitarist's historic gear in the *Guitarist* photo studio, assembling the disparate rigs that reflect the evolving musical direction, personnel and circumstances of Rory's three-decade career.

Formed in Cork in late '66, but making their mark after moving to Belfast a year later, Rory's first serious band, Taste, was a fiery power-trio whose combustible telepathy rivalled Cream. Yet in this early period, the guitarist clung to the gear of his teen apprenticeship on Ireland's showband circuit. He was already wedded to the '61 Stratocaster – reputedly one of the first to

"EVERYONE ELSE HAD WALLS OF MARSHALLS, BUT RORY JUST TURNED UP, PUT A VOX AC30 ON TWO CHAIRS AND LET RIP"

Daniel Gallagher

If ever a rig was destined to cut through a mix it's this: a Fender Strat, a Treble Booster and the punchy Vox AC30 combo

3. Rory's Dallas Rangemaster Treble Booster was arguably misnamed as it really emphasises screaming upper mids

4. A Vox on a fold-out chair was (almost) all Rory needed to play storming sets to giant festival crowds

> "Taste were ferocious live, and how hard he ran the amp, and the signal into the amp, gave him that incredible tone... and the booster really made it scream"
> *Daniel Gallagher*

arrive on Irish shores – that would become his closest thing to a calling card. "It was very easy to play from the start – it has a very flat kind of neck – and I've kept it ever since," he said. As for the beat-to-hell aesthetic, Rory shrugged: "There's a theory that the less paint on a guitar, the better."

Daniel picks up the story: "He'd had a Rosetti Solid 7 and a no-name amp before that, but when he joined the Fontana showband at 15, they had a Vox AC30 and as soon as he plugged in his Strat, there was a love affair there – that would carry on to him starting Taste. He still had the AC30 with the Strat and then, in about '67, he came across the Dallas Rangemaster Treble Booster, which he ran into the Vox's Normal Channel. From '68 – the second iteration of Taste – that's when you really hear that combination. Taste were ferocious live, and how hard and high he ran the amp and the signal into the amp gave him that incredible tone. He'd have the amp all the way up then control the volume via the guitar. And the booster really made it scream."

Arguably, the finest example of that holy trinity is Taste's casually brilliant set at the 1970 Isle Of Wight Festival. "Everyone else had walls of Marshalls, but Rory just turned up, put a Vox AC30 on two folded-out chairs and let rip," shares Daniel in disbelief. "It's a hell of a sound."

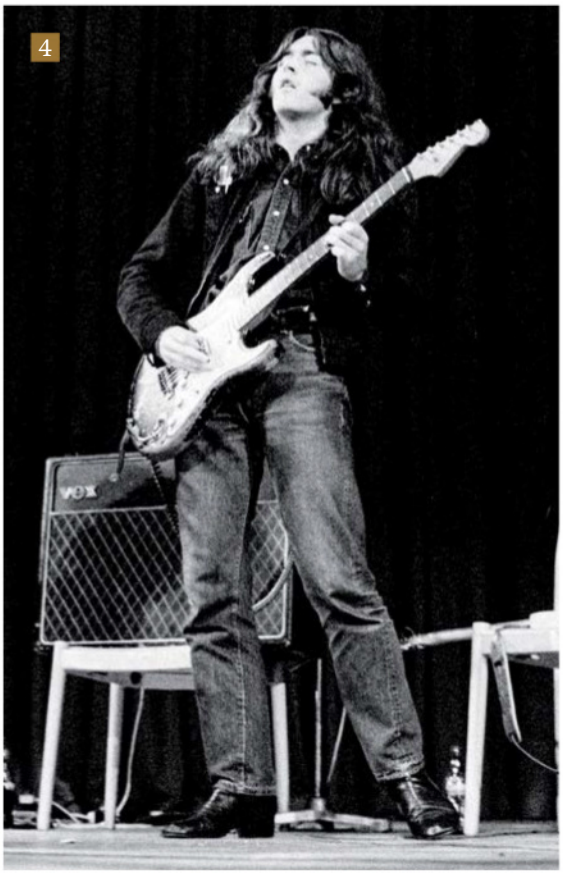


PHOTO BY JORGEN ANGEL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

5. Rory performing in Reading in 1975. By this point, after the seminal 1974 Irish Tour, he had filled out his sound with a Tweed Fender Twin augmenting the AC30

6. In terms of balance, matching a Fender Tweed Twin with the Vox was inspired. Fenders typically deliver clearly defined top- and bottom-end, while British amps excel at screaming midrange tones

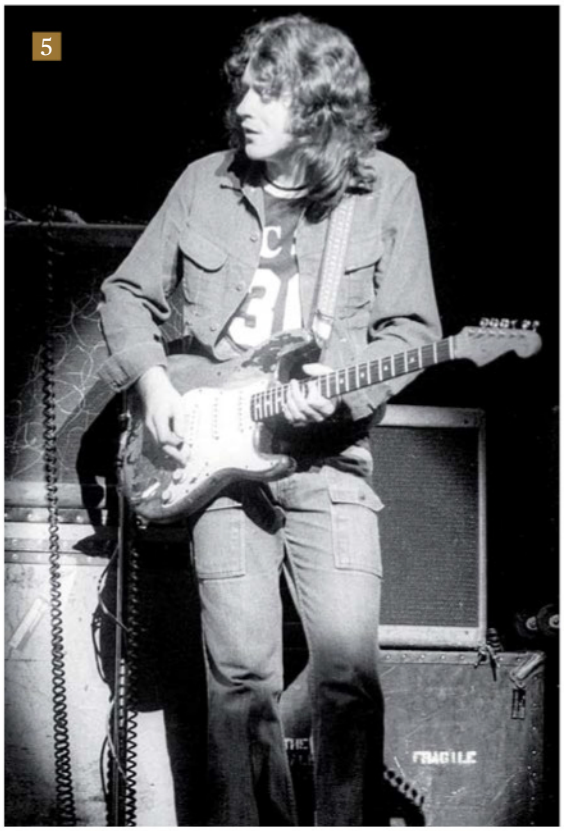
IN BAD TASTE...

Critically revered but living in penury due to bad management, Taste were nearing the end as they crossed the English Channel. The band's sour split left its scars on Rory – he would never revisit Taste's material live – but his backline was too good to dismiss. "He stuck with that sound through his first two solo records and 1972's *Live In Europe*," explains Daniel. "Rory's first solo album [*Rory Gallagher*] had Wilgar Campbell on drums and Gerry McAvoy on bass, and it was almost jazzy. Even when they were loud, they went off in places and Rory's guitar runs are quite jazzy and he has quite a clean tone."

Following that solo breakout, there's an argument that the best year to watch Rory Gallagher live was 1974, as he returned to Troubles-torn Belfast for the incendiary shows that would be cherry-picked for the deathless *Irish Tour '74* album. At a time when most stars avoided Northern Ireland, Gallagher earned added kudos among his countrymen by lodging at The Europa, which enjoyed the dubious accolade of the world's most bombed hotel.

"*Irish Tour '74* is hard to beat," says Daniel. "I always found his cover of Tony Joe White's *As The Crow Flies* a magical moment. You get this audience hush because he's just playing his National guitar."

> "Wilgar Campbell was on drums and Gerry McAvoy on bass, and it was almost jazzy. Even when they were loud they went off in places, and Rory has quite a clean tone"
>
> *Daniel Gallagher*



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7. During our shoot we were able to decipher, for the first time, the scored-out inscription on the neckplate of Rory's 1959 Esquire: "Property of Buzz Harding, Greensburg, Kansas." Presumably a previous owner!

8. Rory's shift away from the Vox to a two-amp rig that typically comprised a Tweed Bassman and a brown-panel Fender Concert reflected wider changes to his career and line-up

"RORY HAD BROUGHT IN A KEYBOARD PLAYER AND A NEW DRUMMER. I THINK HE'D HAD TO FIND HIS NEW PLACE IN THE EQ SPECTRUM"

Daniel Gallagher

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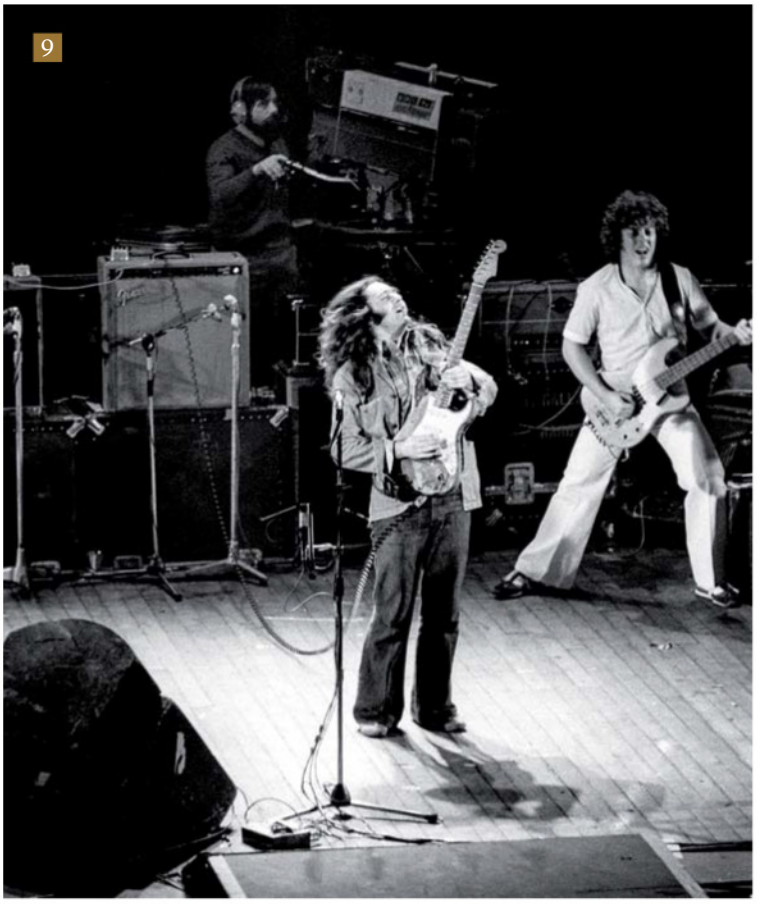


ODILE NOËL / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

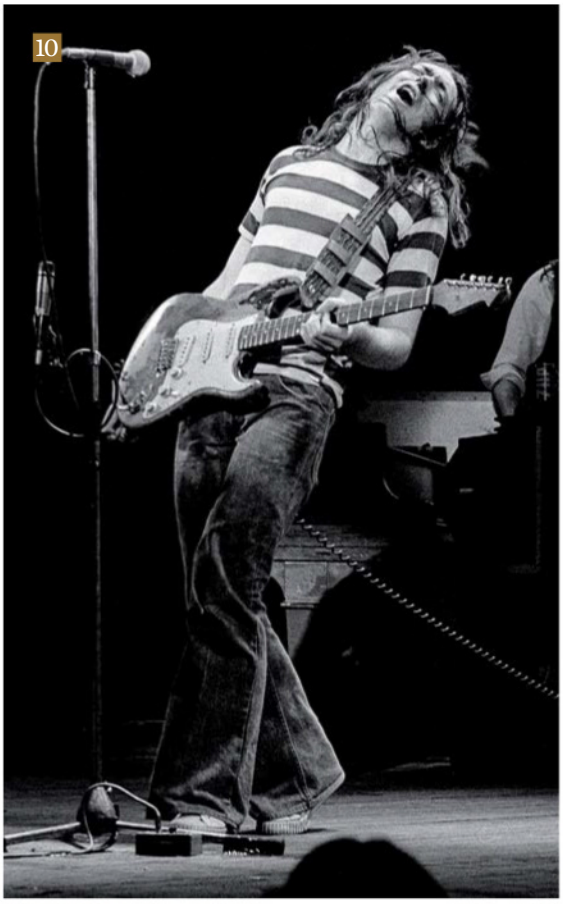


PHOTO BY FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

9. Rory Gallagher performing at the Lyceum Theatre, London, in 1977. By this time, a dual-amp, all-Fender rig was very much his preferred setup – incorporating a Fender Concert he had acquired around that time period

10. Whatever changes Rory wrought to his backline, one thing stayed the same: total commitment and unrelenting energy during performances

At those rabble-rousing shows, eagle-eyed fans noticed changes afoot. "In about '73, Rory had brought in a keyboard player [Lou Martin] and a new drummer [Rod De'ath]. I think he'd had to find his new place in the EQ spectrum. Maybe the ferocity of the Rangemaster and AC30 wasn't fitting in with the piano, so he added a Fender Twin, which gave him a rounder sound. And then, going into 1975's *Against The Grain*, that line-up got quite funky. He adds in soul covers like *I Take What I Want*, and I think the Fender fitted that."

Around the same period, the gloriously battered Fender Bassman you see here entered the frame. "He fell in love with that amp and started going to the Bassman and Twin together," says Daniel. "When Rory went on big US tours opening for Deep Purple and the Faces, they were playing stadiums. That might have been another reason to go for two 4x10 Fenders together, because the Vox wasn't going to do it at Madison Square Garden, y'know?"

> "When Rory went on big US tours opening for Deep Purple and the Faces, they were playing stadiums. That might have been another reason to go for 4x10 Fenders"
> *Daniel Gallagher*

By the late 70s – another unmissable period caught on 2020's posthumous *Check Shirt Wizard* release – Rory had alighted on a third Fender combo. "He'd come across the Concert," says Daniel. "So in about '77 he'd start linking the Bassman and Concert with a Hawk II booster, which had that graphic-equalising effect. In the studio, he'd even drive the hell out of small Fender Champs, but on stage, it needed to be a 4x10. The two Fenders together did that for him for a good while."

It was Rory's growing heaviosity at the turn of the decade – summed up by 1980's *Stage Struck* – that demanded a rethink. "Getting into that harder rock period of *Photo-Finish* [1978] and *Top Priority* [1979], Rory started messing around with Ampeg VTs. Then, by *Stage Struck*, he had two Marshall 50-watt JMP combos hooked together with this Boss DB-5 pedal that he used as an equaliser, pushing the mids on

11. The Hawk II Tone Expander introduced a more flexible element to Rory's tone-shaping – as always, Rory sought to sculpt a live sound built around frequencies that cut through an increasingly crowded mix but still sounded expressive and rich

12. Rory's transition to a pair of 50-watt Marshall JMP 2104 2x12 combos allowed him to stand out against the hard-hitting drumming of Ted McKenna

the two amps. It was a ferociously loud band, with Ted McKenna, who was Rory's hardest-hitting drummer. So maybe his thinking was, 'This is my big tone for this hard-rock period.' He'd always played pinch harmonics, but the squeals he gets on *Stage Struck* are very particular from how hard he's pushing those Marshalls."

THE LAST DECADE

The received wisdom is that Gallagher was past his peak by the early 90s, but that's refuted by the stinging tracks on *All Around Man: Live In London*. "There was nothing written on the tapes," reflects Daniel of initiating the project, "but I could hear the songs were from *Fresh Evidence* [1990] and *Defender* [1987]. Then he calls out in the second song – 'Great to be here at the Town & Country!' – which is now the O2 Forum [Kentish Town].

"There's always trepidation," he admits. "You don't think of Rory having bad gigs, but could it be one of those? But it's just phenomenal. The line-up is Gerry on bass, Brendan O'Neill on drums, Geraint Watkins on accordion and Mark Feltham on harmonica, and they're absolutely flying. Rory, at this point, is almost more groove-based. *On Heaven's Gate* and *Continental Op*, his playing is lot more in the pocket. There's an eight-minute version of *Ghost Blues*, really killer rhythmic stuff. Almost like Billy Gibbons: a very earthy style of playing, compared with the '71 stuff. At one point he does these volume swells in *Moonchild* and it's jaw-dropping."

> "The gig was just phenomenal – the band were absolutely flying and Rory, at this point, is more groove-based... his playing is a lot more in the pocket"
> *Daniel Gallagher*

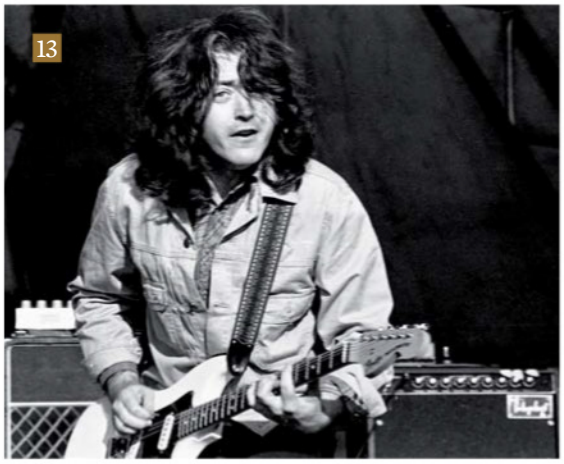
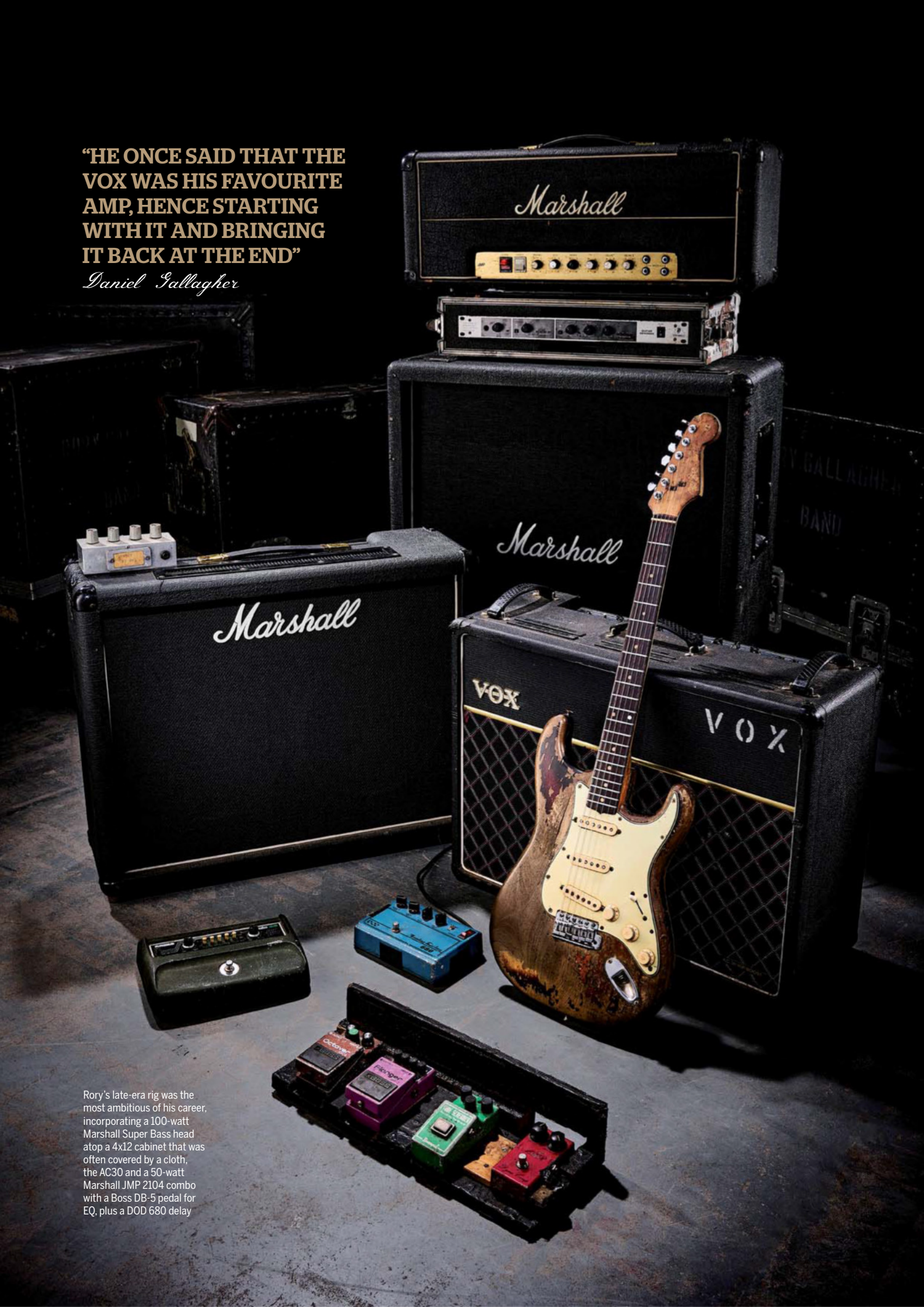


PHOTO BY INDEPENDENT NEWS AND MEDIA/GETTY IMAGES

For his last stand, Rory came full circle – with a twist. "He said once that the Vox was his favourite amp, hence starting out with it and bringing it back at the end," reflects Daniel. "It was always there in the back of his mind, even when he was cheating on it with the Fenders! On the Vox, he had a slapback using an analogue delay, so that would be the Memory Man or DOD 680.

13. Rory Gallagher in action at the Hot Press Music Festival at Punchestown Racecourse, Kildare, in 1982. The Vox AC30, his first love when it came to amplifiers, was now back in the running again but was typically augmented by Marshalls, too

“HE ONCE SAID THAT THE VOX WAS HIS FAVOURITE AMP, HENCE STARTING WITH IT AND BRINGING IT BACK AT THE END”
Daniel Gallagher



Rory’s late-era rig was the most ambitious of his career, incorporating a 100-watt Marshall Super Bass head atop a 4x12 cabinet that was often covered by a cloth, the AC30 and a 50-watt Marshall JMP 2104 combo with a Boss DB-5 pedal for EQ, plus a DOD 680 delay

"THE BOSS OCTAVE PEDAL ADDED COLOUR TO HIS SOLOS AND THE TUBE SCREAMER WAS TO GO EVEN LOUDER"

Daniel Gallagher

Rory's pedalboard included a script-logo MXR Dyna Comp and an Ibanez TS808 Tube Screamer for kicking amps to the next level of sustain and gain. Boss BF-2 Flanger and OC-2 Octaver pedals reflected Rory's increased interest in subtle modulation and pitch manipulation. The DOD 680 analogue delay was used for slapback echo, while the Boss DS-5 Driver was an unusual EQ and boost pedal

"He covered up the 412 speaker cabinet and just showed the head of the Super Bass, which was converted to be more of a Super Lead"
Daniel Gallagher

"For these London shows," continues Daniel, "he'd gone for the Marshall into the Vox, into a Marshall stack. But it's funny because having always been known for playing through combos, he didn't want to go, 'Well, now I'm the stack guy.' So he covered up the 412 speaker cabinet and just showed the head of that Super Bass, which was converted to be more of a Super Lead. Each of those three amps were mic'd up separately, so it was fun mixing them: the slapback echo on the Vox, the midrange'd Marshall 50-watt and the dirt from the Super Bass."

By this point, Rory also had more underfoot. "The Boss octave pedal added colour to his solos and the Tube Screamer was to go even louder," explains Daniel. "For certain songs he'd add flanger: *Shadow Play* had those little touches, just for variety and mystique. He had the Dyna Comp on all the time in this period. And he still had the DB-5 into the Marshall. It's funny how certain boxes 'belonged' to certain amps. Like, the Rangemaster belonged to the Vox; you don't see him putting it into any of the Fenders."

As we break and box the iconic backlines that changed the course of blues-rock, it's hard to shake the hope that Rory would smile down to hear his rigs roar once again. For the late Irishman, these careworn guitars and amps were the sound of the road, and for Rory Gallagher, the road was life. "I think it was his happiest place," concludes Daniel. "I always got the feeling he was only himself for the two hours of every day he'd be on stage..." G

***All Around Man: Live In London* is released on 7 July on CD and vinyl**

ODILE NOEL / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

14. Rory never stopped experimenting in his quest to achieve the best possible sound. Here he is pictured trying out new equipment at Nomis Studios, London, in 1989

ROCK of AGES

YouTube guitar maven **Pete Thorn** and racing driver **James Cole** have brought rock's greatest riffs to the stage in their stunning *Classic Rock Show*, powered by an enviable collection of vintage and custom guitars. We join them to find out how they've nailed the sound of legendary hits from the 70s and beyond – and are having a blast doing it

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Will Ireland

"I want it to be loud, a little out of control," says Pete Thorn, in his urbane Los Angeles drawl. "There needs to be some feedback."

Even if you've never watched any of Pete's highly regarded YouTube videos exploring the world of cutting-edge guitar gear, you've almost certainly heard his playing before. He's been a first-call session and sideman for huge acts such as the Eagles, Chris Cornell and Alicia Keys. Now, however, he's reflecting on what it takes to recreate rock's greatest hits on stage without the music becoming too predictable or sanitised. "There's got to be some balls..." agrees James Cole, with refreshing directness.

James is Pete's musical partner in the noble (and reassuringly loud) enterprise that is *The Classic Rock Show*. A veteran racing driver who has competed in Formula 2 and British Touring Car Championships, James has been the musical director of *The Classic Rock Show* since 2015. Apart from during the pandemic, the show has been on the road every year since 2012, packing out auditoriums up and down the country. Covering everything from Zeppelin to the Eagles and Van Halen over the course of two majestic sets, the eight-strong band has its work cut out, but, for them, it's all part of the fun.

Today, we've joined James and Pete in Eastbourne on the South Coast, which was once the scene of pitched battles between mods and rockers. They're performing here tonight, but with soundcheck not quite ready to begin, they have a bit of time spare to talk about music and show us some of the beautiful guitars they've brought on tour. To kick things off, we ask them about a challenge that all bands that cover classic material face... how slavishly faithful to the original recordings do you need to be?

"If you're gonna play *Another Brick In The Wall*, that solo has to be right," James reflects, "because it's so iconic. And part of that [quest for accuracy] – just speaking for myself – is to prove that I can do it. But then once you've done that, then it's like, okay, well, at the end of the day, yes, we're doing it for ourselves as musicians, but it's really about the 1,000 people who have paid to come and see us - so it's what makes *them* happy. And what makes them go, 'Wow' at the end of the night.

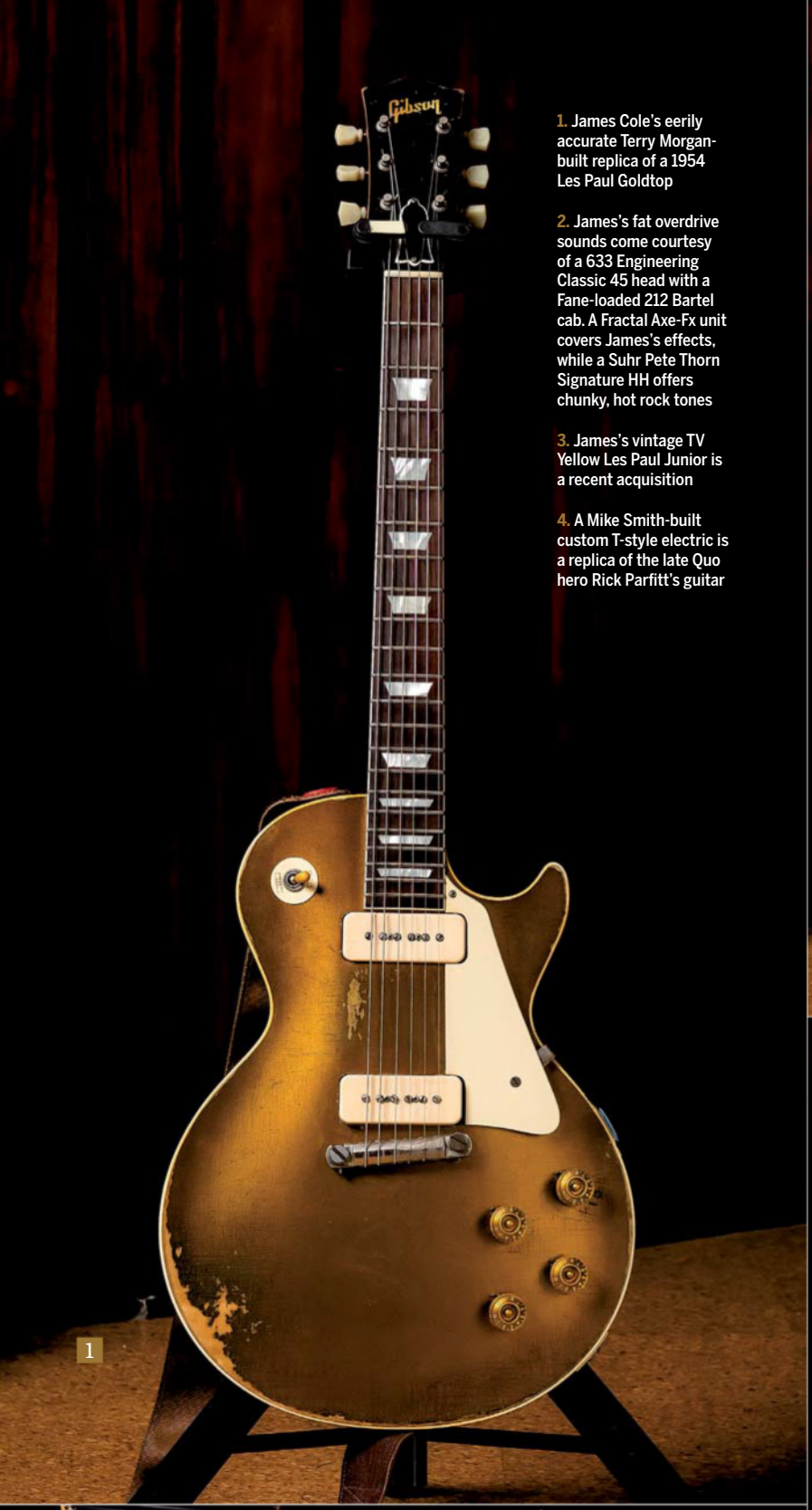
"In the early days of *The Classic Rock Show* and other shows I've performed with, there's been so much focus on playing it right, rather than performing and putting on a show for the audience. And I think my focus has moved – not to 'less detail' but to focusing on what's important," he says.

CLASSIC TONE

For James and Pete, a big part of getting the spirit of the music right, as well as the detail, is using real valve amps, rather than digital modelling. That means the band's rigs have to be a blend of old-school valve tone and sophisticated effects and routing gear (see rig images, from page 76) to ensure they have the flexibility to cover a wide-ranging setlist. But despite the technical demands of making analogue kit perform in a programmable way, both Pete and James believe the sonic payoff is worth it.

"We had a friend who used to play in the show, Bobby Harrison, who joined us on stage last night," James says. "The three of us did *Free Bird* and Bobby's [recently] been doing shows with Cliff Richard, using Kempers and everything. But he just went, 'Wow! Playing through amps again!'"

The Classic Rock Show's musical director James Cole (left) and guitarist Pete Thorn photographed at Eastbourne's Congress Theatre



1

1. James Cole's eerily accurate Terry Morgan-built replica of a 1954 Les Paul Goldtop

2. James's fat overdrive sounds come courtesy of a 633 Engineering Classic 45 head with a Fane-loaded 212 Bartel cab. A Fractal Axe-Fx unit covers James's effects, while a Suhr Pete Thorn Signature HH offers chunky, hot rock tones

3. James's vintage TV Yellow Les Paul Junior is a recent acquisition

4. A Mike Smith-built custom T-style electric is a replica of the late Quo hero Rick Parfitt's guitar

2

3

4

Pete Thorn uses a two-amp rig featuring a prototype Suhr SL68 head that is effectively a heavily modded 'Plexi' plus a 4x12 cabinet with Greenbacks in the top and Vintage 30s in the bottom for his dirty and crunch tones. The SL68 is, in fact, a prototype head that has some unique tricks up its sleeve. Spotting some non-standard switches on its control panel, we ask Pete what everything does.

"These are little mods that John [Suhr] did for me," he says before smiling. "So he's gonna hate me talking about this because he'll get requests for these, I'm sure. But basically this [first one is a] switchable Bright. So it just goes between Off and then two different Bright values. And I use it in the 4,700pF bright value [mode], which is like what Marshall was doing from '68 to about '72. It's a really big, bright cap. That kind of makes it a one-trick pony – but it's an *amazing* trick. When you get the amp up to about 7 or 7.5, it's just got the teeth because of the bright cap and it sounds great.

"The next one is a switchable value for the mid-pot... Eddie Van Halen's amp had kind of an odd mid-pot value, it just kind of makes it sound a little more open, a little more gain-y, you know, but it's very subtle. And then the other one is for a switchable Fat Cap in the front-end. It sounds a little fuller, bigger or a little more 'soft-Marshall'."

Off to one side of the SL68, Pete also has a Suhr Bella combo set aside for the clean work. His pedalboard features analogue and digital effects and is routed to serve both amps with the separate groups of effects that best suit them. He also uses a high-end Shure Axient wireless system for freedom of movement on stage, which he describes as "just flawless". Plus voltage-regulation gear ensures his amps get exactly the power they need, as venue power supplies can wander up to 10 volts above and below where they ought to be, which can hurt amp performance and reliability.

"I have a very vivid memory of the original Ernie Ball Music Man EVH signature – seeing it in a magazine for the first time..." **PETE THORN**

James, meanwhile, pairs a 633 Engineering head with a Bartel cabinet, using a high-end Axe-Fx unit by Fractal Audio to provide his effects.

"I run the [633] Classic 45, which is a JTM45-style head, at 20 watts, but it's amazingly loud. With the headroom switch [engaged], it's amazing how loud 20 watts can be. And we've got that running into a Bartel 2x12, which has got Alnico Fane [loudspeakers] in it. It's a one-channel amp, which I'm running in a four-cable method with the Axe-Fx. And I'm using the Axe-Fx purely for pre- and post-effects. The amp is cranked so, apart from three sounds where I require a boost, all the overdrive is coming from the amp."

EDDIE'S INFLUENCE

With these rigs as the core of their sound, the rest of Pete and James's tonal variation comes from their guitars, which are a stunning selection of custom instruments and vintage pieces. Lest this sound like a bad case of high-end Gear Acquisition Syndrome, the guitars chosen by both men typically have either a close personal connection or an interesting backstory. Pete Thorn is a lifelong fan of Van Halen and, as such, the presence of an original 90s Ernie Ball Music Man EVH signature model shouldn't be a surprise.

"I mean, the thing about this guitar is I have this really vivid memory of it," Pete reflects. "Seeing it in a magazine ad for the first time... I mean, I was a big Eddie Van Halen fan and we were used to seeing him with the 'Stripe' guitars, first his Frankenstein, then the Kramer. And then this... it was like, 'What the heck is that?' Because it looked like a Tele body shape a little bit and had a neck pickup and it was a flame-top. And it was like, 'God, it's so different.' But it was one of those things where I think, over time, a year or two passes, and we all got used to it.

"It's interesting to me because the pickup in the Kramer was evidently what the reference was for [the pickups on the first Ernie Ball signature guitar] – kind of, 'Take a look at that and then let's try and get something close to that for the bridge pickup in these.' And DiMarzio ended

5. James's National Duolian was refinished in red at some stage in its long history and is used for the intro to Dire Straits' *Romeo And Juliet* and also *The Chain* by Fleetwood Mac

6. James's 1957 Les Paul Goldtop is still a mainstay on stage

up winding a whole bunch of different prototype pickups for it. I think legend has it that Steve Lukather was up there, and Eddie was like, 'I don't know which one I like best out of the last two [prototypes]... why don't you pick?' Supposedly, Steve was the one that said, 'I like this one.' So Eddie Van Halen was like, 'All right, let's go with that one.' And so the pickups in the guitar are totally unique to these guitars. DiMarzio won't make them as an aftermarket. So it's a unique pickup that has a really cool sound."

Pete says he sought an original example of this model for quite a while before one arrived by a striking act of generosity from a stranger.

"I've always wanted one of these and I'd look occasionally for them, to find one. And I'd often thought about buying one because it was part of my childhood. But then a fellow named Simon Legg, who's a fan of *The Classic Rock Show*, approached me about this guitar, saying that he'd bought one on Denmark Street around 1993. He'd kept the guitar under the bed. He played a little bit, but not a lot, and he was just aware from YouTube what a huge Van Halen fan I am. I guess there's just a part of him that wanted to see it played, probably.

"So he said, 'I want you to have this guitar.' It was so sweet, coming from a stranger, and he was there with his wife – they literally found me round by the backstage door – and his wife said, 'He's been looking for you for six months to try to talk to you about this guitar.' I didn't know what to say at first. So I said, 'Look, I can't take this guitar from you without doing something at least, in a similar spirit and in your name. I'll make a donation to Mr Holland's Opus [Foundation],' which is a music education charity that Eddie Van Halen supported."

MIGHTY MORGANS

Like Pete's, many of the guitars that James has taken on tour have a deeper story than might first be apparent. When we ask why he had brought two Goldtops, James explains that while the humbucker-equipped '57 was a vintage original, the second Goldtop – seemingly a completely authentic '54 model with twin P-90s – was, in fact, the work of Terry Morgan, a hugely talented home luthier whose hand-built guitars were not mere 'copies' of vintage Gibsons but breathtakingly authentic doppelgangers.

"Terry Morgan was from just outside of Birmingham and he built Les Pauls in his garage," James explains of Morgan's legacy as a luthier. "He was the loveliest man, who died in [April] 2020. We think there are between 70 and 90 Les Pauls out there that he did. My one is a [replica of a] '54 Goldtop and I've had very well-known luthiers tell me this is a real one and swear to me that there's no way this can be a replica," he says.

"Terry Morgan built Les Pauls in his garage. My one's a '54 Goldtop; I've had luthiers tell me there's no way this can be a replica..." **JAMES COLE**

"Terry was a factory engineer who worked for Chubb," James continues. "He'd always wanted a [classic vintage] electric guitar but couldn't afford one, so he started to build them. But then he was made redundant in the early 2000s and he actually got some money and bought a '54, for probably a few grand back then. So he used that as his reference for all these guitars. There's an argument that his most accurate guitars are the ones with P-90s and with the low-logos [on the headstock] because that was his reference."

Even with an original '57 Goldtop ready to hand, the '54-style Terry Morgan has become a go-to guitar for *The Classic Rock Show*.

"This guitar didn't get used very much at the beginning of the tour," James explains. "But in the last third of this tour, I've just wanted to use this one. I don't know why, or what's changed in me. But I started using this on *Free Bird*, which I'd never done before and it's my favourite guitar now."

Compared with the PAF-powered 1957 model, he says the Terry Morgan guitar's P-90s offer a broader spectrum of tones, especially if you make full use of the controls.

7. Pete Thorn in action on stage. He says learning Ritchie Blackmore's licks on *Burn* has changed his appreciation of the Deep Purple hero

8. Blackstar's compact Amped 1 pedalboard amplifier acts as a fail-safe should any of the complex signal chain for the Suhr amps and pedalboards go down

9. Pete's unique modded Suhr SL68 head provides the grunt and drive, while a Suhr Bella combo is used for lush cleans

10. Pete's intriguing Leo Scala Underdog single-cut may look like an old 'Burst, but it features extensive chambering, with slot-like apertures around the perimeter of the body to act as quasi-soundholes

11. The Suhr Pete Thorn Standard HSS in Garnet Red is a go-to workhorse for Pete during the show

12. Pete's pristine Ernie Ball Music Man EVH signature from the 90s was a gift from a British fan named Simon Legg

13. Pete's beautiful Suhr Aura was one of a run of just 100 such LP-style electrics made by John Suhr and is, in fact, the prototype for the others. It subtly but extensively updates the classic formula with belly cuts, geometry changes and other finessed details

14. Pete's complex pedalboard deserves its own article (watch this space), but notable pedals include Klon and Dumble-style tones from the Crazy Tube Circuits Unobtainium dual overdrive and utility EQ and boost from the Unit67 by DryBell

"When you turn it down, it feels like it has a lot more detail. It cleans up nicer than the '57," James says. "I'm using the tone control a lot more to get different sounds, especially when I'm playing slide because it's so bright. You really have to dial the tone down in *Free Bird*, just try to get it to mellow out and warm up."

15. James Cole and Pete Thorn tearing it up in Eastbourne. The show is an annual fixture and tours the length and breadth of the UK

"Jimmy Page is the ultimate guy to listen to if you're worried about making mistakes… Because that doesn't exist in his world" **PETE THORN**

James adds that the Goldtop and his S-style Suhr now form the main go-to guitars used for the show, though he's brought quite a few other interesting electrics with him for use on particular tracks (see pics on previous pages).

LEARN TO BURN

Of course, even the best guitars would be nothing without a skilled musician, and in the case of *The Classic Rock Show* those skills go beyond simple musicianship, extending into the realm of how to interpret and imitate the hallmark licks of some of the greatest guitarists who ever put pick to string. Has learning the work of so many iconic players changed Pete's perspective on any of them?

"I've never learned a lot of Blackmore stuff before, but learning *Burn* for this tour really made me pay attention to what he's doing rhythm guitar-wise and everything," Pete reflects. "He's such a unique, amazing guitar player. His phrasing is so cool, he just played with so much fire... So learning *Burn* was really amazing."

However, Pete says that one player in particular teaches the invaluable lesson that it's not always how precisely you play something but the spirit you bring to it.

"Jimmy Page's playing was like a stream of consciousness – it was about freedom of ideas. He didn't care about things like mistakes, I don't think," Pete reflects. "Like when you watch some of his solos, especially live, it's really magical – he's the ultimate guy to listen to and try to absorb if you're uptight about your playing and worried about making mistakes... Because that doesn't exist in his world. It's all cool. It's a really appealing sound because it's so human. That and the fact that he doesn't choke. He might make an error or do something that's not technically correct. But he never *chokes* – he always moves on to the next thing. And that's part of his sound and it's the beauty of his playing. It's so magical and so rock 'n' roll, in a way."

When performing such classic material, if you can strike the golden balance between delivering a tight performance and making sparks fly with sheer energy and exuberance, it has a really special effect on people, Pete adds.

"A guy came up to me the other night – he leaned over the table at the meet-and-greet afterwards and he goes, 'I'm 75 years old and you guys just made me feel like I'm 25.' That's great. That is the coolest thing." **www.theclassicrockshow.com**

Guitarist GEAR OF THE YEAR

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Spill The T

After a year of speculation, PRS launches not one but two new bolt-on solidbodies inspired – it would seem – by the first production electric guitar. Just don't mention the T word!

Words Dave Burrluck
Photography Phil Barker

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What You Need To Know

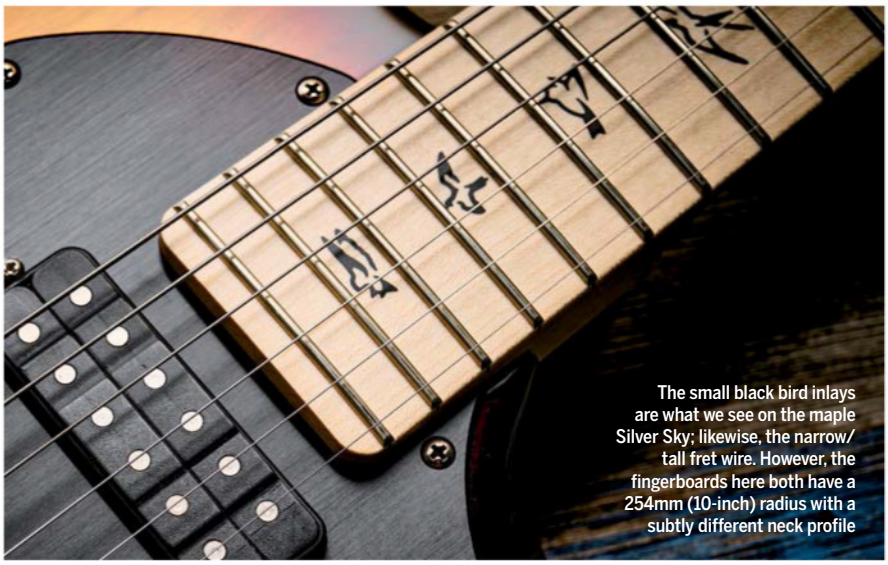
1. **Just what the world needs – another copy!**
We have referred to PRS's Silver Sky as a 'Stratocaster' with the wrong headstock, and it's pretty clear what inspired these new designs. But PRS's take (or should that be takes) on the classic single-cut bolt-on actually has little to do with the specifics of Fender's original design.

2. **Tell us more...**
The body shapes differ and appear a little way from the beloved Telecaster. The bridge is very different, and the strings don't anchor at the back of the body, which is also lightly contoured. Both feature dual humbuckers, not single coils. All fundamental differences.

3. **These models look like two different guitars.**
Yes, Myles Kennedy's signature is very much the guitar he's been using for the past year or so. The NF 53 is the standard production model, if you like. There are plenty of differences – large and small – that give each guitar their own character.

The majority of signature guitars are based on an existing model and then pimped up a bit to suit the artist. Mark Tremonti's PRS signature, for example, is based on the PRS Singlecut, Dave Grissom's signature on the PRS McCarty. But in recent years PRS has changed tack a little. John Mayer's Silver Sky might have heavily borrowed from the style of the Stratocaster, but in PRS's catalogue it was a new design; Mark Lettieri's HSS Fiore was another, albeit with less specific inspiration.

Long-time PRS user Myles Kennedy started a bit of an internet rumpus back in 2022 by showing off a custom-made PRS on stage. Its single-cut slab body with two pickups had the internet calling it a PRS 'Telecaster'. All PRS itself would tell us was that "like many artist guitars, it is simply a custom build that we did for Myles to fulfil some of his needs on this tour and in support of his latest solo album", *The Ides Of March*. Pretty much a year on since those rumours started, that 'custom build' is now being released as the



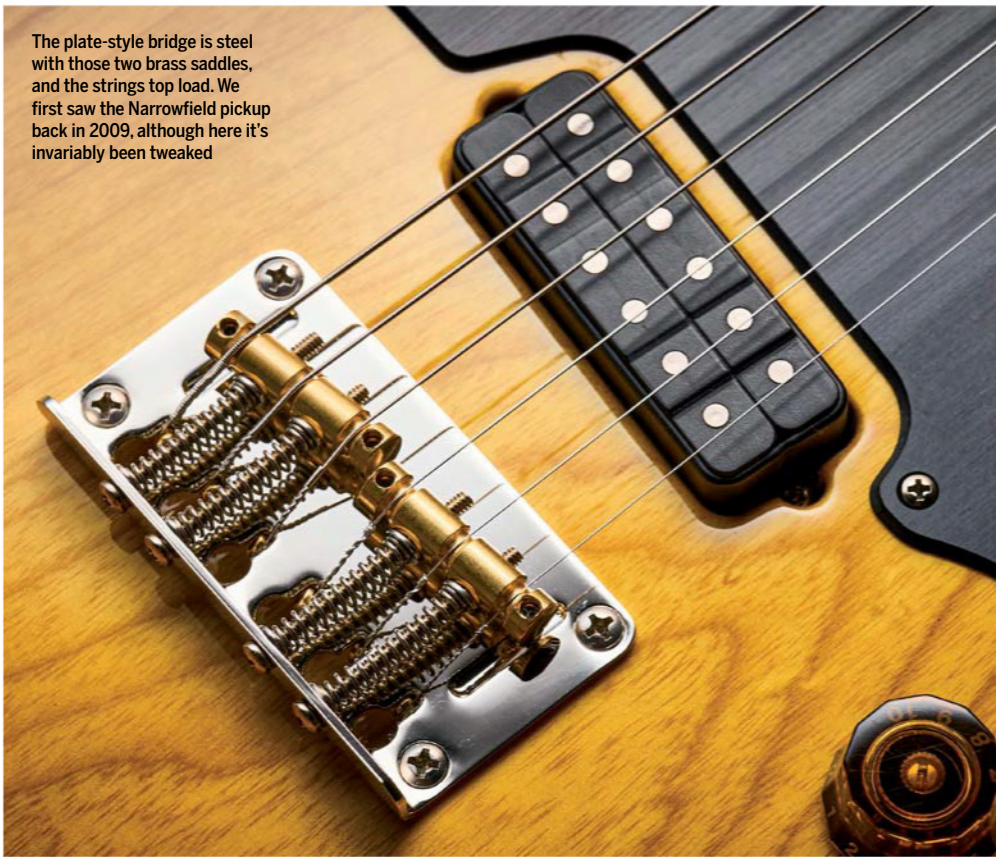
The small black bird inlays are what we see on the maple Silver Sky; likewise, the narrow/tall fret wire. However, the fingerboards here both have a 254mm (10-inch) radius with a subtly different neck profile

THE RIVALS

Where to start? At this level, your options aren't limited, although you'd be lucky to snag a new Fender Custom Shop Tele for much less than £4k, more if you want some relicing. Of course, there's plenty of Tele choice from the production models, such as the three-pickup Brent Mason (£2,789); the American Ultra Luxe (£2,269) has hum-cancelling Ultra Noiseless Vintage pickups.

Drop into the more boutique market and you can't ignore Suhr's Classic T (from approx. £3k in-store) with its SSCII hum-cancelling system, swamp ash body and stainless-steel frets. Don't forget Joe Knaggs' Choptank, either; that's another T-inspired build (from approx. £2.8-3k in store). But really these are the tip of the iceberg.

Here in the UK, we're becoming spoiled for choice with plenty of T-inspired £3k-plus boutique builds from makers including Patrick James Eggle, Seth Baccus and Atkin, to name just three, while Gordon-Smith's T-style is a more affordable favourite starting around £999 with plenty of options.



The plate-style bridge is steel with those two brass saddles, and the strings top load. We first saw the Narrowfield pickup back in 2009, although here it's invariably been tweaked

Myles Kennedy: a completely new signature model in PRS's Bolt-On range.

The bigger surprise, however, is that there's another model with a single-cut slab body and two pickups being released at the same time: the NF 53, a guitar "inspired by one of Paul Reed Smith's vintage guitars from 1953", we're told.

So, if the inspiration for both guitars is pretty clear, the oddity here is that we have a signature version of a guitar that doesn't exist and a new standard model, released simultaneously, that's significantly different.

Taking Shape

Let's start with the shapes. Drawing around our '69 Tele reference and then the MK, the outlines are actually more similar than they look. The MK's upper shoulder is a little more rounded, like the end of the heel; the treble cutaway is less deep but widened, and the horn is much more PRS-like and, of course, we get the hallmark scoop. The NF 53's outline is a little different again: its shoulder appears slightly pulled out, but there's actually more incurve as it moves into the heel, which is shorter, and of the three it has the deepest cutaway, again with that PRS-like horn and scoop. The waist and the base on the bass side are slightly offset, too.

Both use swamp ash for the body wood, with a classic thickness of 45mm. Through the Tri-Colour Sunburst face of the MK (the sides and back are opaque black), it initially looks like it's one-piece. However, with the overall Black Dog Hair gloss finish of the NF 53, you can clearly see its three-piece construction on the base edge and (possibly annoying for some) in the treble cutaway. The edge radius is more Strat-like than the tighter radius of the Tele and seems the same on both bodies. Each model has slight forearm and rib-cut contours but neither are as deeply shaped as the Silver Sky.

The scratchplate creates its own lines and the NF 53's is a little more Tele-styled; the MK's almost nods to a bat-wing Gibson SG 'plate that's been user-modded. Both appear to be made of the same single-ply ABS material, though the MK's edges are chamfered; on the NF 53, the edges are left square and a little sharp.

The slab-sawn maple necks are certainly more similar, modern PRS Bolt-On in style and with the same smaller-outline black birds, which already featured on the Silver Sky Maple, the Fiore and the Dustie Waring CE 24 Hardtail Limited Edition. There's also the usual scarf-jointed headstock.

> The bridge pickup is where the MK begins to take off: we're hearing almost Les Paul Junior-type heft

That said, the MK's headstock is faced with ebony and there's a 'geometric' owl logo from his *Ides Of March* solo album on the truss rod cover. The NF 53's headstock is unfaced with just the model name on its truss rod cover. The fingerboard radius on both is classic PRS, measuring 254mm (10 inches), and the fretwire seems the same. There's no tint to the natural neck finish, but the MK's finish is all satin; the NF 53's face is satin, but the back is gloss. Then, of course, just to add to the choice, the actual body finishes differ – the MK has five options, the NF 53 just four.

Parts & Pickups

Even the tuner choice differs, with the MK going for a set of PRS-designed, nickel-plated, vintage-style locking tuners. The NF 53's are like those on the Silver Sky, non-locking with larger plastic buttons, although these buttons don't seem as wide across and they're a polished ivory material.

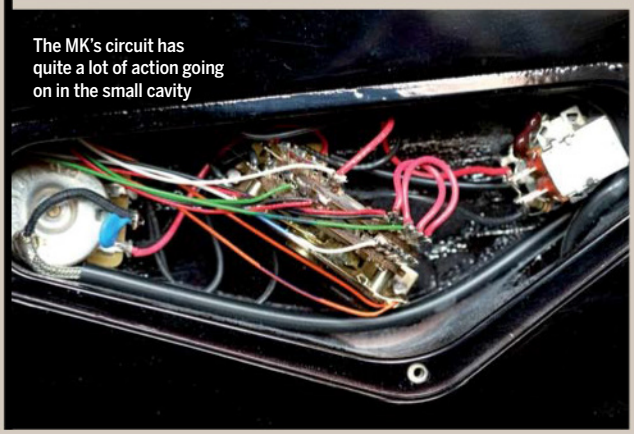
One thing that moves both of these new designs away from their initial inspiration are the bridges, which are the same on both. If you've played or owned a PRS Vela, you'll recognise the design: "This bridge harkens back to Paul's early designs and traditional baseplate-style bridges," states PRS, "but is top-loading for easy restringing." These both use a steel baseplate with small keyholes to allow you to anchor the strings behind the two brass saddles, just under

UNDER THE HOOD

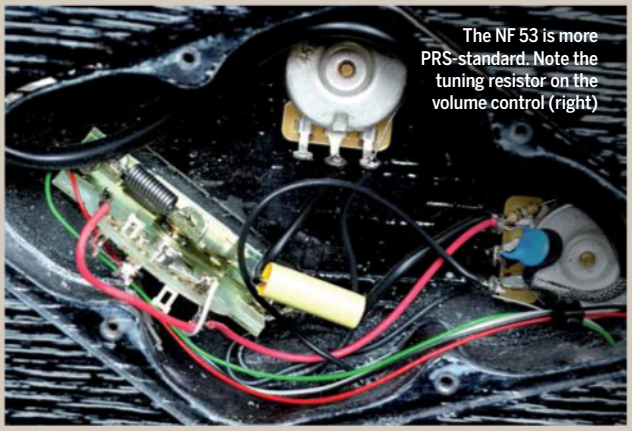
What's going inside these different-sized cavities?

The trickier circuit of the Myles Kennedy centres around a four-pole, five-way lever switch that allows the split- and full-coil combination in positions 2 and 4. Typically, the volume and pull-push tone control are 500kohms, the volume with the usual 180 picofarads treble bleed cap. The pull-switch allows a parallel placed 1meg-ohm resistor to tune the bridge pickup only, so it's 'seeing' a nominal 333k depending on the exact value of the pot. Pulled up, however, the switch engages a 0.1µf cap and 150k resistor (wired in series) to ground, affecting that preset tone roll-off. It is a subtle roll-off, but it definitely sweetens the high-end and might well be a simple mod for any T-style's bridge pickup.

Reflecting its more simple drive, the NF 53 has a pretty standard PRS circuit with a pair of 500K CTS pots and a .033µf tone cap, wired modern style. As usual, we have both a 180picofarads treble bleed capacitor on the volume pot and again a 1meg-ohm resistor to reduce the resistance of the volume pot, which actually measures 349k. Again, all a part of the subtly tuned circuit.



The MK's circuit has quite a lot of action going on in the small cavity



The NF 53 is more PRS-standard. Note the tuning resistor on the volume control (right)

1. Unlike the reverse headstock of the Silver Sky, both headstocks here use the standard PRS shape. On the Myles Kennedy signature it's faced with ebony, and the truss rod cover features an engraved owl motif. The top nuts on both guitars are perfectly shaped bone

2. The only signature on the MK is this scrawl on the neckplate. The NF 53 has the more usual 'PRS Guitars' logo

8mm in diameter, each with overall height adjustment and dual screws to set the position and intonation.

The pickups and controls add to the list of differences. The MK uses a pair of small-aperture PRS Narrowfield humbuckers, and the bridge is slightly angled to enhance the treble response. Both have the same narrow polepiece spacing of approximately 49mm, and while the neck's poles sit nicely under the strings, they certainly don't on the bridge pickup, not least with the 54.5mm string spacing at the bridge plus that slant.

The NF 53's Narrowfield DD (as in 'Deep Dish', an early PRS humbucker) pickups are a very new design and "are made with taller bobbins to fit more winds and extra metal pieces in between the magnets for a more focused, powerful tone", says PRS. They're also narrow aperture humbuckers and both mount directly to the body – the same as the MK's bridge pickup, though its neck pickup is suspended from the scratchplate.

Thankfully, neither guitar uses a distinctive Tele-style control plate: the controls are all rear-mounted. The MK places the master volume and tone in a straight line parallel to the strings, with the angled five-way pickup selector in between. As you can see, the NF 53 goes for a more PRS-like layout where the dual controls are angled, the same as the lower-placed level switch, which is just a three-way this time.

There are no tricks on the NF 53, then, just each individual pickup or both-on together. The MK is more complex with those same three sounds, but in position 2 on the five-way switch we get the full bridge humbucker with the neck-facing single coil of the neck humbucker, in parallel. In position 4, both pickups are split, voicing the outer single coils of each, and combined in parallel. Finally, a pull-switch on the tone control introduces a preset tone roll-off on the bridge pickup only, which affects positions 1 to 4 on the five-way selector.

3. You'll note the tuners here on the NF 53 are non-locking vintage style, unlike the top-locking tuners on the MK model

2

3

Feel & Sounds

Starting with the MK, pulling it from its gigbag we nearly launched the guitar across the room! It is *super* lightweight at just 2.81kg (6.2lb) and the only solidbody guitar of a similar weight from PRS that we can remember was the obeche-bodied Mira-X, which weighed in at 2.6kg (5.75lb). Unplugged, there's quite a pushy, fast response that's less steely sounding than a new CE 24 we had for comparison – it's subtly different.

Running through the sounds plugged in, however, and while it's clear what the original inspiration might have been, does it really sound Tele-like? There's a little of that in the high-end response, certainly on the bridge pickup, but it's a fuller, less thin sound and it really does sit between our '69 Tele and that new CE 24. A T-style with more girth? The neck pickup is similar, a wonderful depth with single-coil snap that – with a little hair – begins to remind this writer of a good Les Paul Deluxe: clear but smooth.

Back to the bridge and that Tele-like honk and bark is present, just without the shrill high-end, and this is where the MK begins to take off: that depth really suits some crunch and we're hearing almost Les Paul Junior-type heft without the noise. Positions 2 and 4 on the five-way add a little more 'Strat' to the proceedings, they're a little thin-sounding perhaps, but they don't detract from the palette, while the centre both-on position is ballsy Keef, the parallel link retaining the clear high-end with some of that bark and depth. It's a big rootsy rhythm sound, for sure.

> Pulling the MK from its gigbag we nearly launched the guitar across the room! It is *super* lightweight

That pull-switch preset tone roll-off is subtle, pulling down the high peak as if you're using a long lead, something that players using the guitar wide open on a big stage might find useful.

The NF 53 is another lightweight guitar, slightly heavier than the MK at 2.97kg (6.54lb), and plugged in we have another flavour: it has less of the MK's girth and produces what most of us would call a more 'Tele-accurate' Fender-esque voice. It's a lighter take, but without the toupée-raising high-end, which sounds almost studio-sweetened as is so typical of modern PRS guitars. While the bridge seems to pull back the peaky honk of the classic Tele slightly, the neck sounds more Strat-like and together they create a full and bouncy mix. Three *very* usable voices. And don't forget these aren't single coils – they don't hum.

Both necks are dimensionally very similar. The MK measures 42.02mm wide at the nut, 52.33mm at the 12th; the NF 53 is 41.9mm and 51.97mm for the same positions. Depth-wise, it's equally close: the MK measuring 22.7mm at the 1st fret and 24.6mm by the 12th; the NF 53 is 22.2mm and also 24.6mm. Shape? To our left hand, the MK feels very slightly V'd, especially in lower positions, while the NF 53 is a little rounder. Both feel superb – the biggest difference in feel is probably the gloss-versus-satin finish. The fret gauge is the same as the current Silver Sky measuring approximately 2.28mm wide and 1.3mm high. It's a medium wire with a good height and perfectly installed, of course. The fingerboard edges are nicely rolled, too.

The slightly different geometry of the treble cutaways means that the NF 53 is marginally airier in terms of top-fret access compared with the MK, but, we honestly had no issues with either.

Any buts? Well, the high E response on the MK's bridge pickup is fractionally soft, but we can't say it bothered us in the least. Intonation isn't 100 per cent thanks to the compromise of the two saddles, but it is more accurate than our '69 Telecaster, even with its intonated (angled) brass saddles.

4. The NF 53's Narrowfield DD differs with its multi-piece poles: "It has 12 magnets and 10 metal slugs," says Paul Reed Smith

Verdict

No-one's hiding the inspiration here, but that's really all it is – and these guitars look, feel and sound a lot less derivative than the Silver Sky. Above all, both bring another 'single coil' flavour to PRS's quality menu, a bit of blue-collar to balance the bling. The NF 53 is the simplest guitar PRS makes in its USA lines: three sounds and the truth that an electric guitar is the sum of its parts. And when those are high-quality, refined and evolved to such a high level as this, the result is astonishing.

The NF 53 produces a more 'Tele-accurate' Fender-esque voice. A lighter take that sounds almost studio-sweetened

While the MK might give us a few more sounds and a little more attitude from its artist association, because the recipe and execution is so good, it's equally valid: one of the vibey-est guitars to leave PRS's pristine temple for some time.

They are different guitars, however, and both are a little more expensive than the Silver Sky and Fiore, for instance. "These will be rare birds," confirms PRS Europe's boss, Gavin Mortimer, "with only around 30 a month heading for Europe between the two models. That won't be enough to satisfy the UK, let alone the other 28 countries we supply. What price [do you put on] exclusivity?" G

PRS MYLES KENNEDY SIGNATURE

PRICE: £3,099 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cut solidbody electric
BODY: Swamp ash
NECK: Maple, Myles Kennedy profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple, black outline bird inlays, 254mm (10") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: PRS plate-style steel bridge with 2x intonated brass saddles, PRS-designed vintage-style locking tuners – nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x PRS Narrowfield MK humbuckers, 5-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume, master tone (with pull-switch to activate preset tone roll-off for bridge pickup)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.81/6.2
OPTIONS: Colour only
RANGE OPTIONS: See NF 53. The SSS John Mayer Silver Sky with either maple or rosewood fingerboard now lists at £2,849. The HSS Fiore lists at £2,829
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Tri-Color Sunburst (as reviewed), Antique White, Black, Hunters Green opaques, Vintage Natural – gloss NOC body; satin nitrocellulose neck

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Light weight; neck shape; playability; hot vintage voicing; very usable humbucking sounds

CONS Visually, the bridge pickup's polepieces seem too narrow; the two-saddle bridge here is a marginal compromise in terms of intonation

PRS NF 53

PRICE: £3,099 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cut, offset solidbody electric
BODY: Swamp ash
NECK: Maple, Pattern 53 profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/41.9mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple, black outline bird inlays, 254mm (10") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: PRS plate-style steel bridge with 2x intonated brass saddles, PRS-designed vintage-style locking tuners – nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x PRS Narrowfield DD humbuckers, 3-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume, master tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.97/6.54
OPTIONS: Colour only
RANGE OPTIONS: See Myles Kennedy Signature
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Black Dog Hair (as reviewed), Blue Matteo, McCarty Tobacco Sunburst, White Dog Hair – gloss NOC body; gloss nitrocellulose neck

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Light weight; subtly fuller neck shape; playability; simple palette of single-coil-like humbucking sounds

CONS As with the Myles Kennedy signature, the two-saddle bridge is a marginal compromise in terms of intonation

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Fine Tuning

Satisfying an artist is one thing, creating a new version of an old favourite is another. With the new Myles Kennedy signature and NF 53, PRS has attempted to do both

Words Dave Burrluck

While bolt-on guitars go back to the early days of PRS, the John Mayer Silver Sky cracked the code. "The Silver Sky was a retooling of an historic device," says Paul Reed Smith today. "It was a goal to get somebody incredibly comfortable with our instruments. This [the new MK and NF 53], on the other hand, is after a feel and sound in a different way.

"We've been talking about it for a decade," Paul reveals, "because our artists want *that* sound in their arsenal, but the thing that was not okay with me was the hum [from the single-coil pickups]. Very often with those instruments the hum can be louder than the guitar."

Myles Kennedy bought his first PRS in 1998, the red McCarty that he still uses with Alter Bridge today, but he's a long-time Telecaster player, too. "I was a huge Radiohead fan so my first one is the same [Fender Telecaster Plus] as Jonny Greenwood played with the Lace Sensors: that was the beginning. Then I started becoming enamoured by early Blackguards, '53s, '52s, Nocasters. I really love them, especially those early ones.

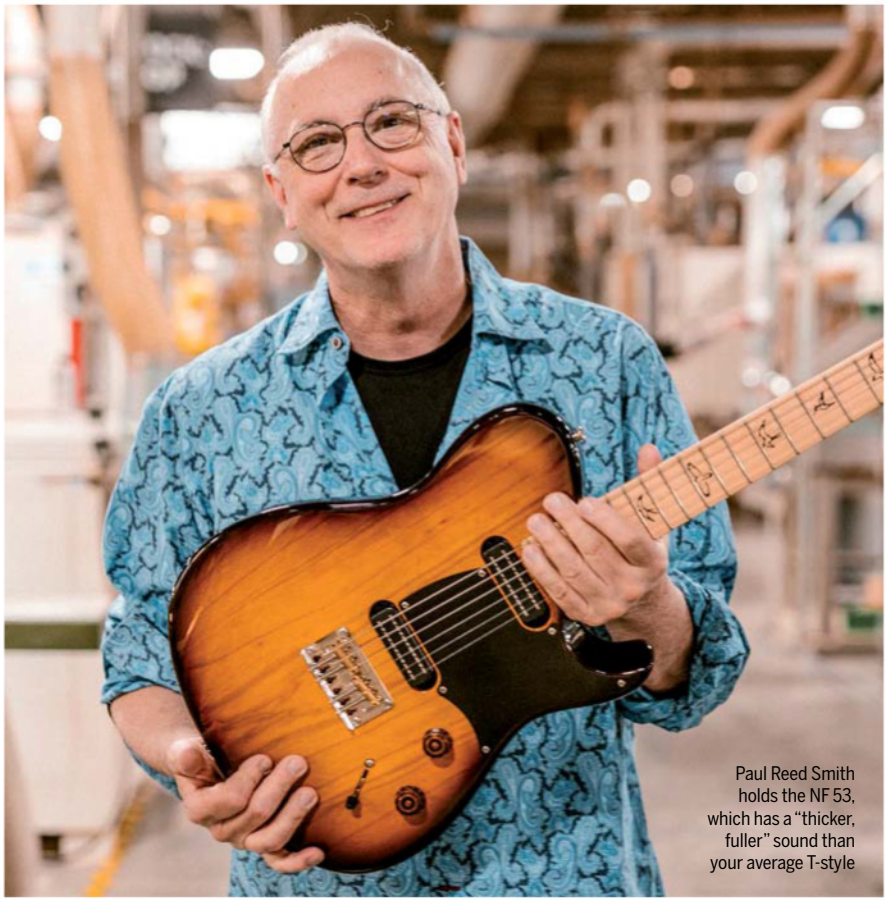
"We actually started talking about doing a signature model some years ago, I'd say about 2014," continues Myles. "But at that time I just wasn't really sure what that would be. After some years, I remember PRS called and said, 'We think it's time, let's do this.' We just started riffing – pun intended! – on what might be cool. They presented the idea: what if we took a more T-style approach? Let's put our heads together and see what we can come up with. I would say that was about two years ago."

Prototypes To Production

The first thing anyone outside of the PRS family knew about the MK signature was when Myles was pictured gigging it in early 2022. "Actually, I had used a prototype for almost the entire recording of the last Alter Bridge record [*Pawns & Kings*, released in October 2022], which had been finished by that point. So what you hear from me on *Pawns & Kings* is that prototype. I remember reaching out to PRS; I was going to do a solo tour and I couldn't imagine not being able to perform with that guitar. It'd become such an important part of the journey. [PRS] were going, 'Well, it's kind of a secret...' But Paul was like, 'Come on, the kid wants to play the guitar!'"

Would we be right in saying that the MK is pretty much Myles' vision of his 'perfect' T-style while the NF 53 is yours, we ask Paul. "Yeah," he says, "except... I sat in with Myles, and what was coming out didn't exactly, as you'd say, sound like a T-style: it sounded like Mr Kennedy playing all the tunes in a studio! I was stunned. It had a sound of its own that I really liked. The NF 53, while it gets that quack, it's a little thicker sounding. If you pick up a '56 or '66 Telecaster it's got an unbearable amount of high-end, the high E's not very loud: they have problems. The NF 53 is thicker, fuller but has *that* sound at the same time.

"The guitars were created in parallel. We were working on the body shape and contouring for the MK at the same time as the NF 53. But to explain launching them at different times would have been almost impossible. To have both explained and evaluated together – as you're doing – where one's a little louder, one's got a little different high midrange, the slightly different body shapes, makes so much more sense. Better to have the conversation now than later."



Paul Reed Smith holds the NF 53, which has a "thicker, fuller" sound than your average T-style

PHOTO BY MIKKO DUMADAG

"We've been talking about it for a decade – our artists want 'that' sound in their arsenal" ***Paul Reed Smith***

Myles finds his new PRS signature equally adept at rock, blues and his not-so-secret love, funk

Like us, Myles has played both new guitars. "I *really* like that guitar [NF 53]," he says. "I feel like if I'm going to sit down and – the key word here is *try* to – play some Danny Gatton licks, it's an amazing guitar. But I think part of the function of the signature guitar is that it really does work well in a rock environment, but it does very well if you're going to use it in a country band. I'm kind of a closet funk guy, too: I love sitting around and jamming to Earth, Wind & Fire or Chic – anything Nile Rodgers, he's the man! The signature works really well for that, but you can play straight up blues and rock. It's a very versatile instrument."

Pickup Tricks

Early on Myles settled for Narrowfield humbuckers: "[PRS] knew I loved single coils. There's a certain tonal characteristic that we all know and love, but the problem with single coils is that they're noisy, especially in high-gain environments with Alter Bridge. So we thought Narrowfields would be perfect. We get the characteristics that we all love, but they're going to be quiet."

But there were tweaks. "They are different [to the standard Narrowfields]," says Paul. "They have different magnets and windings. It's down to TCI again: we tuned those pickups for him. Myles sent us his favourite guitars and we measured them. His intention was to have something in between a Telecaster and a PRS – he was using a Tele on some tracks and a PRS on others, so he wanted to get both [from the same guitar]. We literally put the resonant frequency in the middle, between the two."

As to the completely new NF 53 pickups, we're back to PRS's TCI process: "In our world at PRS we're starting to get to what these things [pickups] are tuned to," says Paul. "We know what the note of the bridge pickup on an old '53 Blackguard is and we're thinking more about the note it's tuned to now, [rather] than calling it a 'Telecaster sound'; we're looking at it as a tuned resonance. It used to be, 'We've got to have that Tele sound,' right? Now it's more like, 'I want that thing to ring at 7.2k [kHz], 7.4k.'"

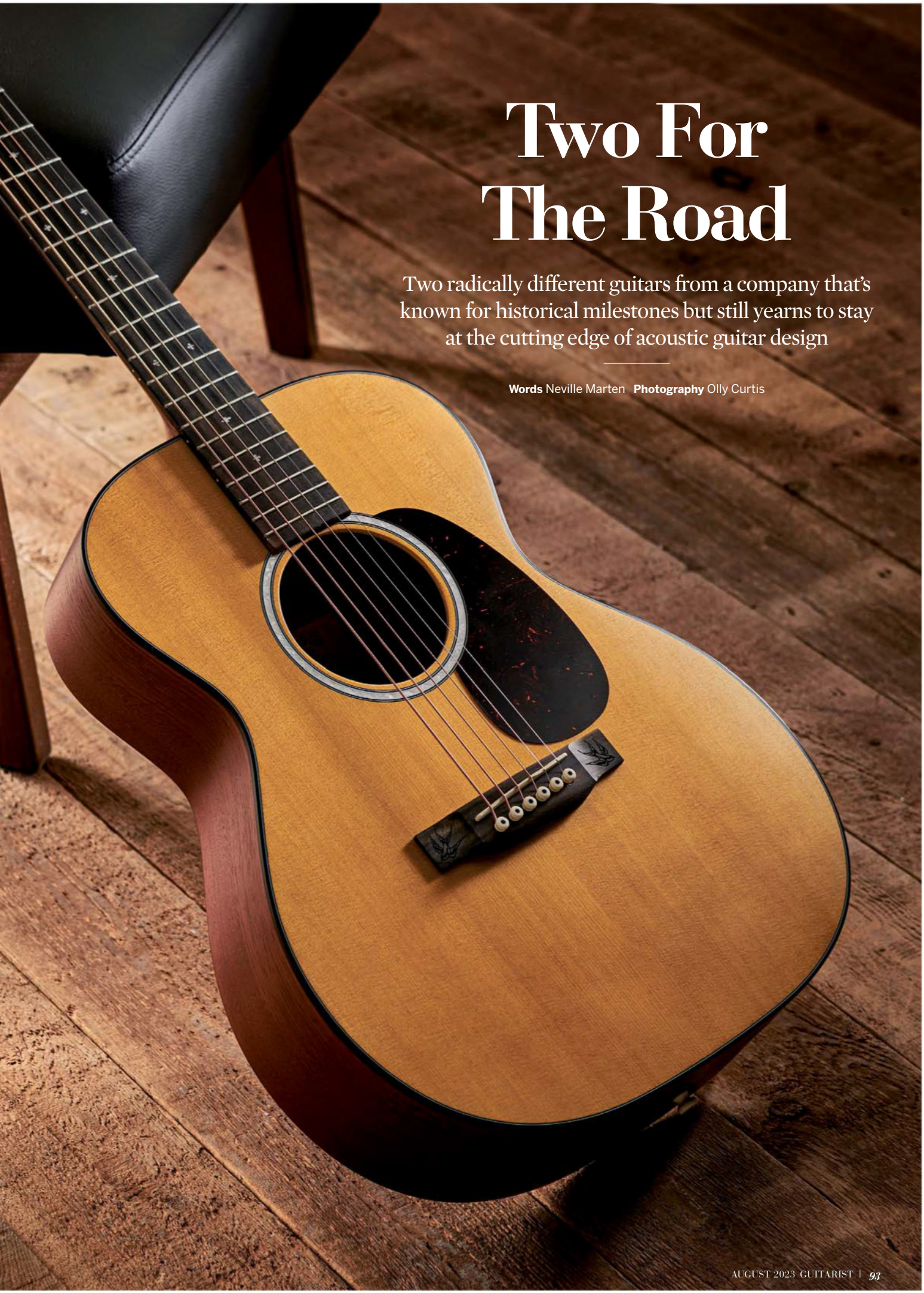
You get the impression that PRS is cleverly playing with reference sounds. For example, Paul isn't a fan of the Telecaster's neck pickup, which, he muses, "isn't great – that's why people have been changing them for years. That's why people like Esquires: it doesn't have a neck pickup so nobody cares. A Strat's neck pickup is tuned higher in pitch; the neck pickup on the NF 53 is tuned to the note of a really good Strat pickup."

While the NF 53 comes across as the purist version, the MK has broader sound options and illustrates more diverse needs, which are increased by the unique preset tone roll-off switch. "I knew I wanted that single-coil top-end, but in the different groups I play with, especially Alter Bridge, that wasn't always going to work," says Myles. "So I thought, 'What if we had something that would shave off the top-end?' Basically, take the tone knob and cut it in half because that's where I would set it a lot of times in that environment [Alter Bridge]. So I said, 'What if we had a push-pull and we also made it so it didn't affect the neck pickup?' Then I can use that full open and get that nice chime-y thing if I need it, or do some funky Nile Rodgers thing without it being too dark. In fact, with Alter Bridge I probably have it pulled out most of the time."

"He wanted [a sound to simulate] a tone control turned down to about 6," adds Paul. "We measured exactly what he wanted and put it in. This is all player-centric stuff.

"We've made a lot of artist guitars," Paul concludes, "and you better do it the way they want otherwise, longterm, they're not going to love them. My opinion is just do it and be done with it. If they want me to put someone else's name on the headstock, that's not going to happen – but pretty much everything else we can do."

PHOTO COURTESY OF PRS GUITARS



Two For The Road

Two radically different guitars from a company that's known for historical milestones but still yearns to stay at the cutting edge of acoustic guitar design

Words Neville Marten **Photography** Olly Curtis

MARTIN ROAD SERIES SHAWN MENDES 000-JR 10-E & SC-10E £875 & £1,375

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What You Need To Know

1. **Who's Shawn Mendes?**
Award-winning Canadian singer-songwriter who's scored multiple Billboard No 1 hits and stands as the youngest male artist to top the Billboard 200 chart with four full-length studio albums. Mendes made it by amassing a huge online following after releasing covers of (among others) Justin Bieber songs.

2. **What's sapele?**
While not a truly genetic mahogany species, sapele sits within the broader family of trees and is often called 'sapele mahogany'. Originating in Tropical Africa it can come in highly figured forms, and is currently not listed as endangered.

3. **Has Martin finally produced a bolt-on neck guitar?**
Not exactly. Martin calls it a "linear dovetail" joint (not like a Fender neck, which is a lap joint), and the two bolts merely pull the tenon tighter to the body for a better fit and greater sound transfer. It also allows the neck to be quickly detached.

Since Martin is such an established brand with models dating back a century or more, it's easy to forget that those instruments were truly groundbreaking and that innovation is part of the company's DNA. The 1916 dreadnought, for instance, brought new size and power to the guitar world, while 1929's 14-fret neck Orchestra Model was a monumental innovation, and pattern sizes such as 0, 00, 000, OM, D and so on have become industry standards. Not to mention X bracing, another construction detail that's become more or less standard (Taylor's V-Class and others notwithstanding).

But far from sitting on its laurels, the company continues to innovate today, employing wood alternatives and composites, and selectively introducing new styles and body sizes, like the OM-shaped but jumbo proportioned J-40, the brilliant Dreadnought Junior and a host of artist collaborations.

The two guitars we see here, especially the SC-10E, push those boundaries even further. Both part of Martin's Road Series, designed first and foremost as stage guitars, they are Mexican-made, laminated designs, employ sustainably sourced materials, and carry purposeful Fishman pickup systems.

Shawn Mendes' 000-JR 10-E features his 'swallow' logo laser etched onto the bridge

THE RIVALS

Lowden's S02 Ed Sheeran (£713) with its solid Sitka spruce top, five-piece rosewood back and sides, ebony fretboard and LR Baggs EAS VTC pickup system is an obvious artist comparison.

But if you're not into either player then Fender's fantastic-looking PS-220E Parlor (£679) is a superb alternative. With handsome binding, soundhole rosette and 'firestripe' pickguard, it also features solid mahogany back and sides, spruce top and mahogany neck, plus Fender/Fishman Sonitone Plus pickup.

Taylor's GS Mini-e Rosewood Plus (£1,099) is a cool upgrade to the 'industry standard' small-bodied acoustic. With gloss-finished laminated rosewood body, solid spruce top, ebony fingerboard and bridge, plus Taylor's ES2 pickup system, it's a grown-up guitar for any size hands.

1. Truss rod, intonation and neck pitch adjustments can all be made from inside the SC-10E's soundhole. Very cool!

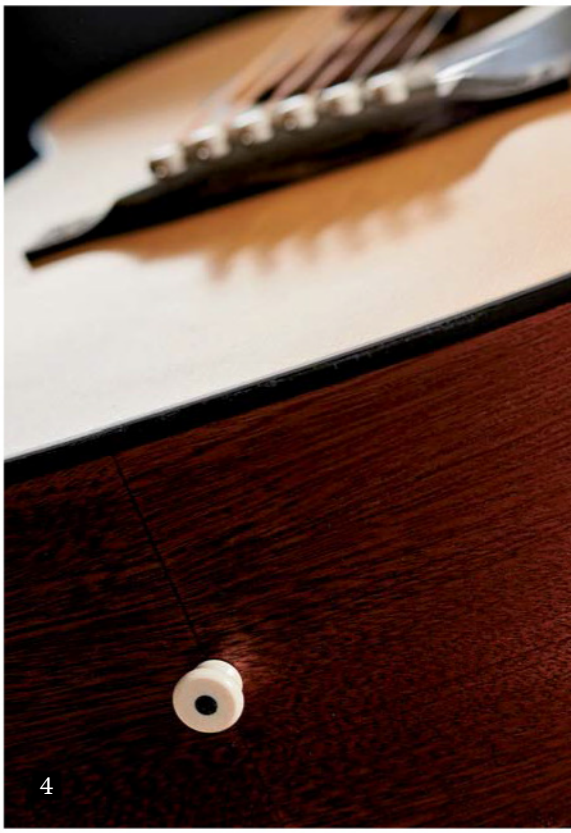
2. Shawn Mendes' 000-JR peghead features the classic Martin logo, a 44.45mm nut and Schaller-style tuners

Shawn Mendes' first album, *Handwritten*, propelled him to the toppermost in 2015, so it's not surprising that Martin would get him onboard as a cutting-edge signature artist. The 000 Junior body size of his signature model measures only 356mm (14 inches) across its lower bout and 97mm (3.81 inches) at the deepest part of the rim. It's also thin-skin matt finished, which leaves an open-pore effect on everything bar the straight-grained spruce top.

Ornamentation is subtle here and includes split diamond fingerboard inlays and a simple soundhole rosette; Shawn's personalised swallow emblem (reflecting the tattoo on the guitarist's hand) is laser-etched onto the bridge, plus there are song lyrics hidden inside the body and Mendes' signature inlaid at the 3rd fret. Other than that, it's about as simple as an acoustic guitar can get.

Mendes stipulated the use of sustainable materials, hence Martin's selection of FSC-certified timbers throughout, including sapele back and sides, 'sipo' mahogany neck, plus ebony fingerboard.

Although fitted with a short-scale neck of just 649.6mm (24 inches), the guitar doesn't stint on dimensions at the nut, instead boasting a finger-friendly and grown-up 44.45mm (1.75 inches). Fishman's trusty Sonitone is Mendes' pickup of choice, with volume and tone controls located inside the soundhole. Tuners are sealed units, the pickguard mock tortoise and that's about it.



3. The SC-10E's Sure Align 'linear dovetail' neck joint is revolutionary, with its two tightening bolts and a highly sculpted body behind a virtually non-existent heel providing total access to all frets

4. On the Shawn Mendes model the instrument jack plugs into a plate located on the guitar's lower rim. The battery compartment resides here, too, and this powers the onboard pickup

5. As well as his 'swallow' logo on the bridge and song lyrics hidden inside the body, Mendes' signature also appears in pearl at the 3rd fret

The SC-10E is a far more radical proposition. The S-style debuted at the NAMM Show in January 2020 as the SC-13E, and caused rather a stir as it deviates so markedly from anything Martin has done before. This version is all-new and priced to appeal to an even broader range of players and pockets. Based on the same offset shape, the body is a koa-veneer laminate with the same satin finish as the Mendes guitar. Again, it's all certified FSC-approved timbers, which includes what Martin refers to as a "select hardwood" neck, which is clearly some type of mahogany.

Aside from the guitar's radical looks, what the company is keen to stress is its new-style neck profile and neck-to-body joint. The neck itself meets the body at its 13th fret, itself an unusual feature, but it allows Martin to position the bridge at its most advantageous point on the spruce top, for both structural and sonic reasons, and to create a neck that appears shorter even though it's not. This was done to improve playing comfort when standing up.

On top of all this is a deep, sweeping cutaway and a cleverly engineered body that's designed for super top-end access. Martin calls it the Sure Align "linear dovetail", and describes the neck as sliding into the dovetail, with the two bolts visible behind the heel area pulling it tightly to the body. There are further adjustment points inside to allow a Martin service centre to alter factors such as intonation and neck pitch.

Then there's the neck itself. Martin describes it as "elliptical" in shape, meaning it employs different profiles that change as the player's hand moves from the nut to the body end. It's said to make the neck virtually disappear in the guitarist's hand, and is slimmer than Martin's usual neck profile. And while it looks like there's virtually no taper from body end to the nut, in fact it reduces from 22mm at the 10th fret, to a super-comfy 20.9mm at the 1st. The whole thing is a stunning piece of woodworking engineering, and a drastic move forward in acoustic guitar design.

Inside, we find Fishman's MX-T soundhole-mounted preamp with under-saddle piezo pickup, separate soundhole-mounted volume and tone controls, and a handy tuner that mutes the output.

One last thing: while the SC carries Martin's usual X-bracing pattern, 'because they could' the designers placed one on the back, too, since it neither added to nor subtracted from the sound but simply looks cool. As does the deliberately frivolous 'jukebox record' style label.

Feel & Sounds

The 000JR-10E Shawn Mendes guitar is a simple and fuss-free affair that just gets on with its business. Its small and slender body, short-scale neck and general chuckability mean it won't get in the way of your performance. The neck is small

and easy on the fretting hand. Its medium C profile, 44.45mm nut and 14 frets clear of the body means it plays like a regular acoustic, but everything's just that bit easier. Martin's computerised Plek system means it's set up perfectly from day one, too.

While no cannon-like dreadnought, the 000-JR spits out a ringing, mid-focused tone that, while not the most sophisticated voice, projects well and cuts through.

Plugging into a Bose L1 PA system whose line-array speaker setup achieves great acoustic sounds, the Sonitone doesn't disappoint. In fact, the guitar is much more rewarding amplified, the preamp's simple controls letting you tweak things so the balance is both bright and plummy. It would work just as well for solo accompaniment as in a full band mix. The stage is clearly the 000JR-10E's true element.

There's a lot more going on with the SC-10E. Acoustically, it's quite complex for a smallish guitar. Possibly sweeter and brighter than some OM models, which can exhibit a hardish middle part of the spectrum – which, of course, makes them project so well. This one is at home strumming Eagles chords as it is picking out James Taylor-esque arpeggios and bluesy fills. The SC-10E rewards the player with flattering tones and clear, accurate playing because of the picker's favourite 44.45mm nut, and an action that's set relatively low for an acoustic – 1.65mm and around 2.3mm at the 12th fret.

And there's more that's different about the SC-10E, playability-wise. First off, the neck – with its asymmetrical profile, no actual heel to speak of and the chopped-back body behind the neck joint – leaves the playing area exposed and available all the way to the 20th fret. Plus the low action and light-gauge strings mean you can play lead figures with none of an acoustic's usual hindrances. Then, when standing up to play, the guitar's offset body shape and 13th-fret design put the fretboard in a great position – a bit further into the body but, again, completely accessible. The guitar's slim design adds to this much more streamlined experience.

Powered up through the Bose, there's both a rich bottom-end and a bright but sweet treble register. The Fishman MX-T's tone control provides a slight sweep to the mids. It's subtle, but it's really easy to get a great tone and is very satisfying indeed.

6. With its swept-back body cutaway, modern soundhole rosette and 'celestial bullseye' fingerboard inlay, the SC-10E cuts a decidedly modern dash

The SC-10E is a stunning piece of woodworking engineering – a drastic move forward in acoustic guitar design

7. This great shot of the SC-10E's Sure Align neck joint shows what a work of craftsmanship it is. Check out the heel-less High Performance Taper neck, too, and that lovely nutty tone of the timbers

Verdict

Shawn Mendes' signature 000JR-10E is purposeful rather than spectacular. And that's probably just what he wanted. While you may not choose the 000JR to serenade your beloved, you could have a ball cavorting with it around the stage, where it would deliver great tones and effortless playability. And it comes in at way under a grand, so it wins for value, too – not to mention those sustainability credentials.

The SC-10E on the other hand is a revelation. We said as much when looking at the SC-13E back in issue 460. But what you get here is more of the same, only stripped of niceties such as gloss finish and so on, and perhaps it's all the better for it.

Martin die-hards may baulk on first meeting one, but play it for an hour and we'll almost guarantee a full conversion, so infectious are its sound and playability. The offset look is mega cool, too (especially on a strap), and although cosmetic adornments are scant bar the 12th-fret 'celestial bullseye' inlay, even that lends to its clear purpose as a player's and guitar-lover's delight.

We're sure that the two available models are just the beginning for the offset S-style design, and look forward to seeing what comes next. If you get the chance, go and try one (get the dealer to let you plug it in, too). Rarely has £1,375 seemed like such a steal. A giant leap for guitarkind!

MARTIN 000-JR10E SHAWN MENDES

PRICE: £875
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: Non-cutaway Junior-sized acoustic
TOP: Solid FSC certified spruce
BACK/SIDES: Solid FSC-certified sapele
MAX RIM DEPTH: 97mm (3.81")
MAX BODY WIDTH: 356mm (14")
NECK: FSC-certified sipo
SCALE LENGTH: 609.6mm (24")
TUNERS: Martin sealed, chrome
NUT/WIDTH: White Corian/ 44.45mm (1.75")
FINGERBOARD: FSC certified ebony
FRETS: 20 medium-fine
BRIDGE/SPACING: FSC-certified ebony with white compensated Tusq saddle, 54.76mm (2.156")
ELECTRICS: Fishman Sonitone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.6k/3.52
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: None
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes
FINISH: Hand-rubbed satin

8/10

PROS Purposeful guitar that does exactly what it says on the tin; plays great and sounds good (better amplified); fantastic value

CONS Doesn't feel overly 'special', and the acoustic tone isn't particularly sophisticated

MARTIN SC-10E

PRICE: £1,375
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: Cutaway offset 13-fret acoustic
TOP: Solid FSC-certified spruce
BACK/SIDES: Koa fine veneer laminate
MAX RIM DEPTH: 102mm (4")
MAX BODY WIDTH: 388mm (15.27")
NECK: Selected hardwood with High Performance Taper and Sure Align joint
SCALE LENGTH: 645.16mm (25.4")
TUNERS: Black, open-gear
NUT/WIDTH: White Corian/ 44.45mm (1.75")
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20 medium-fine
BRIDGE/SPACING: FSC-certified ebony with white compensated Tusq saddle, 54.76mm (21.56")
ELECTRICS: Fishman MX-T preamp and pickup with soundhole mounted tone and volume controls plus tuner
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.7k/3.75
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: None
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Hand-rubbed satin

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Radical but wholly successful new design; unheard-of playability and sweet tones both acoustically and amplified; offers super value

CONS Hardly a criticism at this price, but it is devoid of cosmetic niceties; tuner is a little sluggish

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I live through your moments
Your first shake of the rattle
Your recorder lesson
Your match day anthem
Your queueing anticipation
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Your family singalong
Your swan song.

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House Of Martins

Martin isn't holding back when it comes to new releases – here are just a few from its broad selection for 2023

MARTIN DJR-10E BASS £799

Don't tell the four-stringers... but we all know that not all bassists are guitarists, while all guitarists are, in fact, bass players. So it makes sense that Martin has applied its Junior concept to acoustic basses. Ideal if you want to make the occasional jump down an octave without having to adjust to a full-size stretch, it's got a 610mm (24-inch) scale length, spruce top, sapele back and sides, and is fitted with a Fishman Sonitone BT-1 system. It's available in natural or sunburst.

MARTIN 000CJR-10E STREETMASTER £799

The cost-of-living crisis is often overlooked when it comes to US heritage brands, but Martin hasn't forgotten about the rest of us with its start-up models. Most recently, the 000CJR joins the affordable end of the Martin catalogue. Not only is it an electro-cutaway (Fishman Sonitone), but this gig-ready, 610mm (24-inch) scale traveller is distressed, too – that's a spruce top, with solid back and sides, and it's available left- or right-handed.

MARTIN OM BIOSPHERE £2,499

Following the release of the 00L Earth model in 2021, Martin continued its effort to raise awareness of climate change earlier this year with the introduction of the OM Biosphere. The company says this guitar is the second 100 per cent FSC-certified, plastic-free guitar in production today (the other being the Earth model). The Biosphere is decked out with an ocean scene courtesy of artist Robert Goetzl in support of coral reef regeneration. Even the gigbag is made from hemp!

MARTIN D-18 SATIN AMBERBURST **£2,599**

Martin has added satin finishes to its D-18 and D-28 across the Standard series for 2023, expanding the Gloss natural finish with a further two options. Now, there's nothing wrong with the Satin Natural finish, but we can't get enough of Satin Amberburst, a classy mid-point between shiny and new, and fully aged. All other specs are unchanged: spruce tops and mahogany (D-18) or rosewood (D-28) back and sides, mahogany necks and ebony 'boards.

MARTIN D-28 STREETLEGEND **£2,599**

2023 has so far seen Martin focus largely on D-18 and D-28 models, and both have been given the new StreetLegend aged finish treatment. Inspired by "historic models" found in the Martin museum, it takes the sheen off a brand-new guitar with some aged appointments, including the distressed, satin-finished spruce top, satin East Indian rosewood back and sides, plus open-gear tuners and an aged pickguard – perfect for pre-war troubadour vibes.

MARTIN D-42 BITCOIN **$18,999**

Among the limited-edition launches at this year's NAMM Show (including the 100-piece 000-14 Fret CEO-10 designed by Martin head honcho Thomas Ripsam) is the D-42 Bitcoin. An Engelmann spruce top meets Guatemalan rosewood back and sides, but the showpieces here are the 1oz solid gold token embedded into the headstock and Bitcoin inlays. It'll cost you almost as much as a Bitcoin, but it'll be on the wishlist for the crypto-strummer who has everything. **[SW]**

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DEPTH
FEEDBACK
LIGHT | MEDIUM | HEAVY
WALRUSAUDIO
FUNDAMENTAL
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FEEDBACK
MIX
DIGITAL | ANALOG | REVERSE
HOLD FOR TAP MODE

Bare Necessities

Walrus Audio presents an accessible set of pedals that is designed to last the journey all the way from beginner to pro

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

WALRUS AUDIO
FUNDAMENTAL SERIES PEDALS

£95 TO £125

CONTACT **FACE bvba** PHONE **+32 3 844 67 97** WEB **www.walrusaudio.com**

What You Need To Know

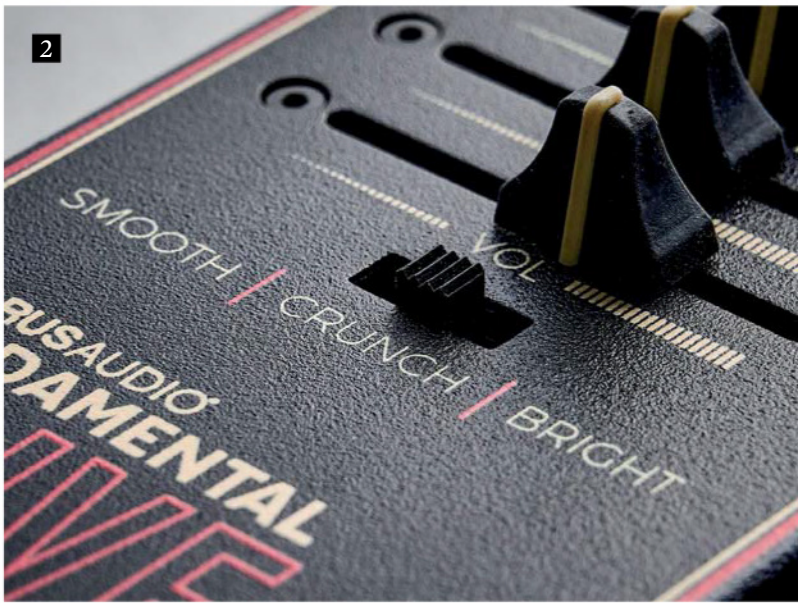
1 I knew Walrus Audio was prolific, but eight pedals at once?
It seems like there's a new high-end pedal from Walrus almost every month, but this lot have been released en masse as they comprise a whole new range: the Fundamental Series.

2 What's so fundamental about this collection?
Walrus says that these pedals offer "the tonal integrity that's required to live on a professional's pedalboard, but with simplified controls friendly enough for even the newest effect pedal users".

3 Looks like there's enough here for a whole pedalboard...
Yes, you could put a decent 'board together with even just a few of the pedals from this series.

Up until now Walrus Audio seems to have specialised in the more complex side of effects pedals, many with fancy graphics. The company's new Fundamental Series, however, couldn't be further from that with a minimalist yet stylish black finish. There are no fancy names here, either; these get straight to the point. If you want a distortion pedal, it's simply called Distortion and so on for another seven of the most popular effects pedal genres – Drive, Fuzz, Tremolo, Chorus, Phaser, Delay and Reverb.

The new series has been designed as a back-to-basics collection with simple controls, a small footprint and a lower price but without any skimping on sound quality. There's plenty of versatility to be found here, too: each has a three-way switch to call up different modes – the Reverb pedal, for example, offers Hall, Spring and Plate reverbs. The rest of the control surface consists of sliders, rather than knobs, to adjust parameters. These feel nice and solid, and each has a centre detent position as a starting point for your tweaking.



1. The only one of the pedals with an extra feature, the Fundamental Delay has tap tempo, which is implemented by holding down the footswitch until the LED blinks at the tempo rate

2. Each of the pedals has three different sound variations selected by this small switch

3. Sliders, rather than knobs, adjust the parameters of the effect. Each has a notched centre-detent position that's a good starting point for any tweaking

4. All the pedals have a power socket on the side – we'd rather have seen it at the top with the I/O sockets to save pedalboard space

Simple controls, a small footprint and a lower price without any skimping on sound quality

While each pedal follows exactly the same format and is nicely sized to make good use of pedalboard space, the power socket is unfortunately sited on the side. This was probably necessary because of space restrictions and circuitry, but we would have liked to have seen it between the I/O connections at the top end, so you could put together a neat row of pedals side by side with no gaps.

Dirt In Triplicate

Building the Fundamental range on a solid foundation are three new dirt pedals. Drive, Distortion and Fuzz all feature a standard triumvirate of Gain, Volume and (wide-ranging) Tone controls and distinct modes that gives them a real three-in-one versatility.

The Drive pedal has Smooth, Crunch and Bright modes, all based around silicon clipping diodes. Smooth offers typical soft clipping, and Crunch adds in a little hard clipping for more of a raspy edge and also boasts a more fulsome low-end. By contrast, Bright is a lot leaner with a low-end cut before the clipping stage and will give you something that will cut through. Between the three, just about all drive scenarios are covered from a boost with some grit to fully driven raunch.

Moving up a notch next, if you want something a little more saturated we get to the Distortion and its three clipping options. Dark and Si both feature silicon clipping, but the former's high-frequency cut gives it a weightier vibe. There's also a set of hard-clipping LEDs, a little louder with some tasty compression.

There are plenty of ways to go with a fuzz pedal and the Fundamental Fuzz reflects that versatility. Classic mode is a traditional fuzz with a mid scoop, while

the Mid+ mode puts the mids back with smooth sustain that's great for a dollop of classic rock. If you want something more alternative, look to the Gate mode created by low bias voltage, which will give you dying battery lo-fi spittiness that will fit in nicely with staccato playing.

Modulation Menu

Tremolo is apparently a favourite effect of Walrus Audio mainman, Colt Westbrook, so it had to be included here. The three modes present different wave shapes. Sine offers the sort of classic rounded flutter and throb you'd find built into a vintage amp, while the Square mode has a harder-edged on/off stutter. Perhaps not one for the purists, Random mode seems to take liberties with the rate of the square wave sound, spitting it out in random patterns. There's plenty of depth and rate variation and we really like that the Volume slider has plenty of output for dialling in a boost.

The Fundamental Phaser is a very decent digital emulation of a classic phaser with plenty of variation with its Light, Medium and Heavy modes and a Feedback control that can dial in a useful degree of metallic mayhem. Another digital pedal, the Fundamental Chorus aims to recreate the classic bucket-brigade modulation of an analogue chorus in Light, Medium and Heavy flavours. Light is reminiscent of a typical 1980s chorus pedal with a range of familiar sounds available by adjusting the standard rate and depth controls, but you also get a Mix parameter for more flexibility, from a light dusting of chorus applied to your dry sound, through to vibrato. Medium mode ups the modulation strength by adding further taps, while Heavy takes you straight to the 80s LA studio scene with its take on the tri-chorus effect.

Fundamentally Spacey

Okay, we've had the dirt and modulation, how about some ambience at the end of your chain? The Delay is a digital pedal with three algorithms. The basic Digital delay is as clean and straight as it comes, while Analog mode is an emulation of bucket-brigade delay pedal sounds, so you get slightly degraded repeats that blend nicely into your signal. The third mode, Reverse, offers slinky reverse delays and is where the Mix slider comes into its own, set at or towards fully wet. While the slider to set the delay time is perfectly functional, you can override it by using the footswitch in tap tempo mode.

The last link in the chain is the Fundamental Reverb, which offers up three algorithms –Hall, Spring and Plate – which should adequately cover all your meat 'n' potatoes ambience needs. All three of these sound really good with plenty of options as to how much reverb you get with the Decay and Mix knobs, while the Tone knob allows you to dial in the darkness or splashiness to sit it right in and complement your core tone. Versatile.

Verdict

Walrus Audio isn't the first company to put a basic/budget range of pedals out recently, but the company seems to have done it in the most stylish way. These Fundamental Series pedals look great, sound equally good and give you solid sonic alternatives in a single unit. The team at Walrus have said they wanted these pedals to be something that those starting out on their electric guitar journey could both afford and easily get to grips with – but still be something they could keep on their 'board as they gain experience and more spending power. We think they've achieved that! G

THE RIVALS

Another boutique US manufacturer with a budget range is JHS with its 3 Series (£99 each), each featuring three parameters (via knobs this time) and a two-way toggle switch for a sound variation. Of the mainstream companies' pedal ranges, there's Gibson's Maestro pedals (around £155), each of which have a two-in-one sonic capability, and there are plenty of options with Fender's nine Hammertone pedals (£65 to £79). For small size and low cost, you could put together a 'board using solely Electro-Harmonix Nano pedals and, of course, let's not forget the Boss Compact range, which can cover just about all possibilities.

Found on the Chorus, Reverb and Delay pedals, the Mix control runs from fully dry to fully wet, which, in the case of the Chorus pedal, means vibrato sounds at the fully wet position

WALRUS AUDIO FUNDAMENTAL SERIES

PRICE: £95 (Drive, Distortion, Fuzz); £125 (Tremolo, Chorus, Phaser, Delay, Reverb)
ORIGIN: USA
FEATURES: True bypass (Drive, Distortion, Fuzz, Tremolo), Buffered bypass (Chorus, Phaser, Delay Reverb), Delay tap tempo
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 60 (w) x 116 (d) x 56mm (h)
DRIVE CONTROLS: Gain, Tone, Volume, Smooth/Crunch/Bright switch, Bypass footswitch
DISTORTION CONTROLS: Gain, Tone, Volume, Dark/Silicon/LED switch, Bypass footswitch
FUZZ CONTROLS: Gain, Tone, Volume, Gate/Classic/Mid+ switch, Bypass footswitch
TREMOLO CONTROLS: Rate, Depth, Volume, Sine/Rectangle/Random switch, Bypass footswitch
CHORUS CONTROLS: Rate, Depth, Mix, Light/Medium/Heavy switch, Bypass footswitch
PHASER CONTROLS: Rate, Depth, Feedback, Light/Medium/Heavy switch, Bypass footswitch
DELAY CONTROLS: Time, Feedback, Mix, Digital/Analog/Reverse switch, Bypass footswitch
REVERB CONTROLS: Decay, Tone, Mix, Hall/Spring/Plate switch, Bypass footswitch

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Compact size and footprint; sound quality; three distinct sounds in each pedal; ergonomic slider interface

CONS Power socket placement

« BLUEPRINT »

PLAY TO WIN

Fender's acclaimed Player Series is celebrating its fifth anniversary and to mark the occasion it's receiving some brand-new colours. Allen Abbassi shares the history behind the best-selling range

Words David Mead & Jamie Dickson

Back in 2018 Fender introduced the Player Series aimed very squarely at guitarists and bass players taking their first steps into the environs of a major brand. Familiar designs that had been seen in the hands of renowned artists for decades were now available to young players who wanted the classic sounds of their forebears with pro-level spec, including C-profile necks, modern 22-fret fingerboards, upgraded bridges and classic F-stamped neckplates. Another undoubted attraction was that the Player Series sat well below the £1k price tag and, most importantly, had *that* name on the headstock.

During the ensuing five years, the Player Series has gone on to be Fender's best-selling line, proving popular with a new generation of musicians whom the company continues to nurture and support to this day. The appeal was strong across all genres, too, with newer bands like Turnstile, Beach Bunny and Soccer Mommy leading the charge with their own brand of pop and rock.

2023 sees the introduction of two additional colours into the range – Seafoam Green and Candy Apple Red – and so we invited Allen Abbassi, director of product, to look back over five years of the Player Series and our first question was the thinking behind the range in the first place.

Director of product, Allen Abbassi, walks us through the thinking behind Fender's best-selling Player Series, which is celebrating its fifth anniversary this year

Could you detail the motivation behind the Player Series when it was first introduced back in 2018?

"Prior to the launch, we had the Standard Series at this price point as Fender's stalwart for probably over 30 years. And the Standard Series itself was a beloved series, it was very popular and it stood the test of time. So, coming around to 2018, we were thinking maybe it's time to do an update. The intent here was to replace the Standard Series with something new and fresh. We had our own vision of where we wanted to go with the Player Series, but because the Standard Series had been around for so long, we had tons of feedback from players, dealers, professionals, artists, and so on, about what they liked and didn't like. In the end, the goal was to design instruments that have modern appointments, combined with some more traditional Fender cues.

"For example, if you look at the Strats, the Player Series went to 22 frets instead of 21. We use the modern bridge on the Strat – a two-point trem – instead of the six-screw vintage synchronised tremolo that we were using on Standard Series, combining that with an already popular modern C-shape satin back neck. This made the Player Series a little more contemporary. But then we also made sure that the body contours were a little bit more dialled into the classic vintage form and we changed the logo of the series back to a spaghetti logo.

"Then, of course, the crown jewel of this series was more traditional Fender-style pickups. The Standard Series had really decent pickups, but they were ceramic magnets. With the Player Series, we made a conscious decision to go to Alnico V pickups and actually we used some Alnico II and Alnico III where appropriate to the model, but we were looking for more of that classic Fender tone but with a bit of an edge, a little bit more midrange presence and a little bit more output. So the Player Series offers very traditional, vintage-inspired guitars and basses but with more modern, player-centric appointments."

"As an entry into the Fender brand, you're getting traditional woods, upgraded hardware and beautifully voiced premium pickups"

1. The F-stamped neckplate on the new Candy Apple Red Jazzmaster
2. 22-fret 'boards are standard on the Fender Player Series
3. An HH pickup configuration on a JM offers a new take on a classic Fender design
4. The range offers a vintage vibe at a very affordable price point
5. Jean Dawson is one of a league of artists using the Player Series

How did you go about choosing which models would work best and suit the Player Series kind of vibe?
"Well, we knew that the usual suspects, the more popular models in other words, were going to stay: Strat, Tele, P-Bass, Jazz Bass. We had also noticed over the years that the offsets had increased in popularity exponentially. So we definitely knew we wanted to have a Jazzmaster and a Jaguar in there. We eventually added a Jaguar Bass and then folded in and included the Mustang in the Player Series, too.

"We have some pretty good bench strength at Fender with the models like the Jazzmasters, the Jaguars and then the Mustangs. So we definitely wanted to infuse that into this series as well. So the choice was easy for us because we had a stable of models that were either already incredibly popular or growing in popularity.

"We like to come out of the gate with mostly new colours, but there'll be a hint at the vintage stuff"

We decided to stretch out a little bit and do an HS Jaguar and then an HH Jazzmaster. And that was more to offer something new and exciting to the players. We found that a lot of players in the Standard Series, and then eventually the Player Series line, were a lot of people that were getting into playing guitar or maybe getting their first real Fender so we wanted to make it new and exciting and fresh for those players as well."

With a catalogue as vast as Fender's, how would you position the Player Series within the range?
"The Player Series is a new guitarist's first step into the Fender brand. Up from here is the Player Plus Series with a load of modern features and the Vintera series that reveres the 50s, 60s and 70s. With Player, you're getting premium hardware. The same tuners that we use on American Pro are on the Player guitars. So, as an entry into the Fender brand, you're getting traditional woods, the upgraded hardware and then the beautifully voiced premium pickups with Alnico V magnets."

Fender has always had a vast swatch of colours available in all its ranges, some being highly prized, some as representative of the brand. The Player Series has some more unusual colours available, how did you go about choosing the finishes for the series?
"I mean, when we came out with Player, we did all new colours, except for maybe the sunburst – you have to have a sunburst in almost every line because that's one of the most popular colours. We were able to infuse the Player Series with a lot of new colourways like Tidepool and Buttercream, and then eventually we introduced Capri Orange and Silver in there as well.

"But we know that some of those classic vintage Fender colours are always fan-favourites and so sometimes we like to infuse some excitement into this series by removing some colours and maybe throwing in some of those more traditional colours. We've just done Candy Apple Red and Seafoam Green – those are very much traditional vintage Fender colours and they work great on the Player Series. So, usually, we like to come out of the gate for a fresh new launch with mostly all brand-new colours, but I think you can probably bet that somewhere down the line any series is going to get a little hint at the vintage stuff, colour-wise."

We can't ignore the instruments from Fender Japan in the overall catalogue hierarchy. They are, perhaps, more affordable than the USA output and have their own kind of uniqueness within the range. Where do you think the Player Series stands in comparison with the Japanese guitars?
"You're right, Japanese guitars are very unique; the guitars have their own vibe, and we love that differentiation. The Japan market absorbs most of the guitars we can

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make at the factories, so we can't get enough of most Japanese guitar models to ship globally. The Player Series is set somewhere right under the traditional series in Japan, as far as price point is concerned.

"In Japan, the most popular product is the stuff that's got a more vintage flavour, like the Traditional Series and the Hybrid Series, which match modern features on vintage models, kind of a hybrid vintage/modern."

Fender has a long-standing tradition of working closely with artists and this has been extended to the Player Series, too. What sort of feedback are you receiving from the younger players who are using the series?

"Absolutely, the series has utilised a wide range of different players. We've had artists like Turnstile, Cherry Glazerr or Japanese Breakfast – all those great artists have used Player. We put the instruments in their hands and we let them choose what they like. But they definitely have feedback for us and we listen to that feedback. Part of the germination of the Player Series was reacting to a lot of that feedback.

5

6. The Player Series is Fender's top-selling range

7. Pickups include Alnico V, II and III magnets for that instantly recognisable vintage tone

8. Six individual string saddles on the Player Series Telecaster offer more stability when it comes to setting the guitar's intonation

"In the Standard Series, we had a lot of artists saying, 'We love the Standard Series, we'd like to see some pickups that had a little bit more traditional core Fender tone.' And so we take feedback like that and we apply it to the product development in concert with our own vision for what the instruments are. Just as Leo Fender himself did, we really love working with artists and getting their feedback."

Many of today's players are choosing to use pedals as part of their sound and it might be true to say that Fender's traditional single coils sit with this in a vastly different way than the higher-output humbuckers. Also, there is a definite trend towards a more vintage tone from contemporary pickups. Has this kind of thinking formed part of the feedback you've been receiving from players?

"One thing I've learned over time is that if you like to use overdrive and a lot of effects, sometimes a lower-output pickup is better suited to handle that kind of environment. Of course, there's a lot of players that do like more output so they can get a chunkier, heavier distortion. We do offer a lot of different types of pickup, but we never – even with our humbuckers – get to the super-hot realm of resistance on a pickup. We stayed at the medium-to-low end of the range."

Returning to the rise and fall in popularity of the offset range over the years, what do you think is the reason behind these models' current in-vogue appeal?

"You know, it's interesting because I think, up till now, we've seen a pretty steady increase in popularity of the offsets, and it doesn't seem to be waning. Certain models, like Mustangs, usually wax and wane a little bit more than, say, Jazzmasters. For some reason, Jazzmasters seem to be the more popular offset. But we recently did the anniversary of the Jaguar and we did some anniversary models there. And in our new American Vintage series, we removed the Jaguar, and we heard some feedback about that, like, 'Hey, where did the Jaguar go?' So I think there's been a very steady increase in popularity with the offsets and I have not seen that start to decrease at all.

"In the decades past, people started gravitating towards vintage offsets – because if you wanted an older Fender, they were way more affordable. And I think once people started doing that, they just discovered the beauty and the variety of tones you can get out of the offset instruments like the Jazzmaster and the Jaguar. And the more models we offered and the more artists that started using them, and the more songs that started to be recorded using offsets, it just increased people's interest. And that's just been steadily increasing and I don't see it stopping right now at all." G

www.fender.com

Manson

GUITAR WORKS

ORYX VI
DRY SATIN
BLACK

ORYX VII
NOLLY RACING
GREEN

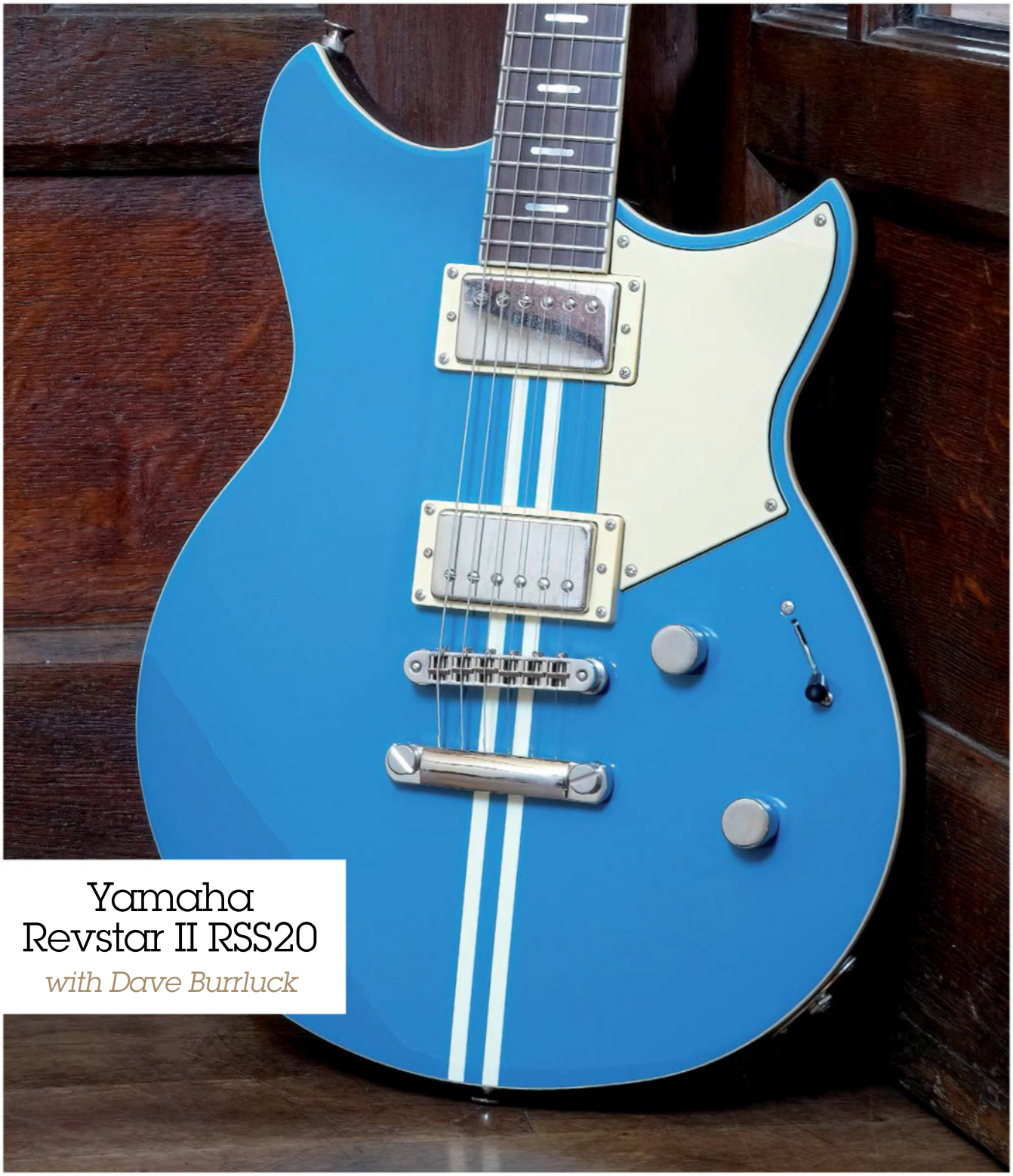
Guitarist GEAR OF THE YEAR

Designed in collaboration with Adam 'Nolly' Getgood

ORYX

Longtermers

A few months' gigging, recording and everything that goes with it – welcome to *Guitarist*'s longterm test report



Yamaha Revstar II RSS20

with Dave Burrluck

Writer

DAVE BURRLUCK
Guitarist, Gear Reviews Editor

After finally getting some extended play time with Yamaha's new Revstars, our reviews editor isn't quite hearing what he wants...

Yamaha's SG1820 (right) is a familiar drive, in contrast to its Revstar's rather different proposition

Simple question: how am I getting on with this new Yamaha? Complicated answer: it's a game of two halves. To be honest, while once upon a time I quite fancied being a guitar designer, today, I'm not so sure. First of all, there's the instant love/hate on social media when a company, especially one such as Yamaha, launches a new range of guitars that would require a very thick skin at best. Next, how on earth can you design, create and market a guitar that's not specifically aimed at one genre, that's affordable enough to be a second instrument (if not a first), and then provide it with sounds that will suit everyone?

As I discussed in the first instalment of this Longtermers test in issue 498, the build quality and overall design is quite exceptional for the money, and that's very apparent. But the voicing is a little, er, unusual. In direct comparison, I fired up my test amps and reminded myself of Yamaha's SG1820 (pictured above), which is more than a decade old. Based on the company's original SG2000 and family, the 18 series simplified the build and, to put it bluntly, is effectively a 'Les Paul' with that distinctive double-horned outline. Shape aside, it sounds like a pretty good LP-style, too: Seymour Duncan 59s, three-way toggle and four controls in the usual places. Very nice.

> "I wasn't completely taken with the idea of the Revstar's Focus Switch [originally] and I'm still scratching my head a little now"

With the Revstar, well, those horns are similar, but the slab body does give a different vibe. And while we have two humbuckers, there's a Fender-style five-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone. As a long-time Les Paul lover, to me the SG1820 sounds and feels pretty familiar. Exactly what the Revstar aims to be isn't quite as easy to decide.

So, hang on. Two humbuckers and two controls: that could be plenty of guitars, but a PRS springs to mind. A key to PRS's designs over the years has always been the combination of humbuckers with some kind of single-coil option. As a gigging guitarist, that makes perfect sense to me. Our Revstar gives us those dual humbuckers, but despite the onboard five-way lever switch we have no single-coil option. Honestly, I'm struggling with the position 2 and 4 partial out-of-phase sounds, which seem to work well enough with some hair and gain, but can I get a good clean 'Fender' sound? Well, not really. And can I ape Peter Green's famous out-of-phase sound? No.

On the original Revstar models, Yamaha introduced the simple but effective Dry Switch (still used on the entry level Element Revstar IIs). It's a straightforward passive high-pass circuit, with a capacitor and a resistor on the pull-switch tone control. It produces a lighter sound with less low-end – quite a good 'single coil' type sound, which is a good contrast to the two humbuckers, or even P-90s.

But our Standard introduces the Focus Switch (activated via a pull-switch on the tone control), which adds a slight boost and with it a rounded high-end as if you've pulled back your tone control. I wasn't completely taken with the idea when I tested those guitars last year and I'm still scratching my head a little now. With some crisp, gainier amp voices, the Focus Switch adds some girth, not least when you pull back the volume (which has a very effective treble bleed circuit to retain clarity). It also works running the guitar clean as an instant fuller, plummier 'jazz' voice. But both of those scenarios could be achieved with a simple stompbox boost, couldn't they? Plus, I could control the *amount* of boost I'm adding. Here, it's all or nothing.

Of course, unless I start drilling holes for mini-toggle switches – which I'm not sure Yamaha would appreciate – I don't have too much to play with, just a switch, volume and tone control. An easy option would be to rewire the guitar PRS-style with a three-way lever switch and a pull-switch on the tone to engage simultaneous coil-splits of both pickups (or, by adding a couple of resistors, partial coil-splits) and create six sounds. Alternatively, I could expand that by having pull-switches on both the volume and tone and now have eight sounds.

Some new components and a couple of resistors aren't going to break the bank; they're certainly much cheaper than buying any new pickups. But, as ever, I'm going to think this through and give my new friend a bit more play time before I warm up the soldering irons! G

Reviewed *485* ***Price*** *£649 (inc gigbag)* ***On Test Since*** *March 2023* ***Studio Session*** *At home, yes* ***Gigged*** *Not yet* ***Mods*** *Not yet* ***uk.yamaha.com***

BOUGHT & SOLD

STEVE LUKATHER

The top sessioneer and Toto stringsman recounts his early six-string experiences and an epic deal on a rare Vox 12-string

Steve Lukather: still wondering why he sold that 1960 Les Paul...

PHOTO BY ALEX SOLCA

What was the first serious guitar you bought with your own money?

"I played a lot of really shitty guitars when I was young. I started out with a Kay acoustic guitar, which was like five bucks at a Thrifty Drug Store. The action was so far off the neck, it was painful to try to get a noise out of – guitars were not very sophisticated in the early 60s. Then the first electric guitar I got was another Thrifty Drug Store guitar called an Astrotone. That one fell over and broke its neck – somebody let somebody play it and they dropped it. My old man goes, 'Well, you're gonna have to play it with a broken neck...'

"So what I used to do was borrow guitars from people who had good guitars. A Fender or Gibson or something like that was rare back then, but they existed. My father would go on the road while he was working behind the cameras in the television movie business and he would come home and say, 'Where do you want to go?' Instead of going to the toy store I wanted to go to the guitar store and play all the expensive guitars I couldn't afford.

"One time I got in there and I grabbed this Les Paul Deluxe off the wall and I was playing my ass off, I guess. I was gonna put it on the wall again and my dad goes, 'Well, let's get it in the car... I thought he was buying me an amp, but he said, 'No, the guitar, too.' He gave up getting a new car for himself to give me an Ampeg VT-22 amp and a Les Paul Deluxe. My parents were great."

> "Instead of the toy store I wanted to go to the guitar store and play all the expensive guitars"

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"I haven't bought a guitar since I started working with Music Man 30 years ago [laughs]. I got a whole new line, the [Ernie Ball Music Man Lukather] L4. There's four different versions of my signature guitar with Music Man, it's sort of like a hybrid of a Strat and a Les Paul and it gives me everything I need in one stop. Plus, I love the company. I love the quality of the guitars. I love that they take care of me so well in every aspect of it, you know?

"They send me stuff and I go, 'I love this'. I don't think I've ever sent anything back. They just made me all brand-new [Heat Treated/HT] pickups – they're astounding."

What's the most incredible find or bargain you ever had when buying guitars?

"It's a treasured part of my collection, a Vox Teardrop 12-string like Brian Jones had. It has all the fuzz tones and all the stuff on, a palm wah-wah with the tremolo bar. It's very strange and very rare and sought after. Tom Petty was buying a whole ton of them – those guys love all that stuff,

STEVE'S GO-TO RIG

"Two Bogner Helios run stereo just for some stereo delays and reverb. I put in the Guru Echosex before the reverb that goes into the loop, which is this beautiful delayed chamber sound, still keeping your regular tone – you know, not buried in goo. I like a little goo, but I don't want to be buried in it. I just got a couple of TC delay pedals. Hand-wired Jam pedals, a Rodenberg customised distortion box [Steve has a signature Rodenberg SL-OD pedal], a Bombastortion – Jeff Kollman's overdrive pedal is killer, especially when you're on high gain, you can get a little extra oomph out of it. I love it. What else is on there? The Strymon [Lex] Leslie simulator and the Strymon reverb. A Jam wah-wah, I have a TC chorus and a TC long stereo delay. Also, I got a Uni-Vibe and I use my Music Man guitars – and that's it."

PHOTO BY ALEX SOLCA

you know? I bought it for 200 bucks, 35 years ago. God knows what it's worth. Not only was it a great deal, but it's such a weird one-off guitar with very unique sounds. It's got that kind of *Satisfaction* fuzz tone sound on it. I don't really go out collecting any more. I've got a lot of friends who do – Joe Bonamassa, who's one of the greats of all time and a dear friend of mine. I mean, his house smells like an old Les Paul case!"

Can you tell us about the strongest case of buyer's remorse you've had after buying a piece of gear?

"I've bought things that I thought I was gonna like more than I did or use more than I did, but I'd sell them or keep them. I have a few *seller's* remorse [stories]. I had a '58 Goldtop that I sold. I mean, I bought it for a couple of grand and somebody offered me $50,000 for it. And this was, like, 20 years ago, my daughter was going to college. I said, 'Well, I haven't played it in a long time,' not thinking about the history that I had with that guitar. And I sold it to this Japanese guy for 50 grand, and I just took care of my daughter's college for a year.

"And then I had a 1960 Les Paul with a thin neck, like Jimmy Page's, which I liked, but it didn't sound anywhere near as good as my '59 'Burst. I didn't play it for, like, 20 years. I figured if I didn't play it for 20 years, I could get rid of it. It was a great investment – what I paid for it and what I sold it for were like, okay, but then I'm going, 'Why am I selling this?' So I stopped doing that."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"Some people like a certain feel, you know? You get a guitar and when you put it in your hand and you feel it, it's a personal connection, and you go, 'Aww, this feels good – this is nice.' And then you have the sound... I think it's a really personal thing. In terms of really great guitars, there are a lot of options that you have today. Pretty good-quality stuff. Apples and oranges, you know, personal taste."

When was the last time you stopped to stare in a guitar shop window and what were you looking at in particular?

"Sometimes I poke my head in and look around and I'll see something that stands out from the rest; maybe an oddball guitar will catch my eye. But I don't go out that much. I'm always working and on my off-time I still have two young kids. I'm a homebody. My days of scouring for guitars [are done]. I got enough guitars! I need to spend more time practising and less time looking."

If forced to make a choice, would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheap amp or a cheap guitar and a top-notch amp?

"Here's a really good answer: there's no magic guitar, no magic amp, there's just magic people. I've played Eddie Van Halen's guitars, Jeff Beck's guitars, and I sound like me. A great guitar and a great amp? Sure, that helps. How could it not? But if you give a 1959 Les Paul to a 10-year-old kid that can't play it's not gonna make him sound like Gary Moore. You know what I mean?"

If you could only use humbuckers or single coils for the rest of your career, which would you choose and why?

"Wow, that's a tough question, man, because I need them both. I can't answer that. It's like, my guitar is a hybrid of all that shit. So, I don't know." **[DM]**

Steve Lukather's new solo album, *Bridges*, is out now via The Players Club/Mascot Label Group

www.stevelukather.com

Steve's signature Ernie Ball Music Man guitar has now reached its fourth iteration, the L4: "It's sort of like a hybrid of a Strat and a Les Paul and it gives me everything I need in one stop," he says

The MOD SQUAD

WIDENING THE RANGE

For the first time in its illustrious history, Fender has launched a range of new pickups that you can't buy on a guitar. Dave Burrluck asks, what's the deal?

This story starts in the late 60s when Seth Lover had jumped ship from Gibson to work for Fender. Pretty soon, he'd been tasked with coming up with a humbucking pickup design – something that Fender didn't have. But not wanting to plagiarise his patented Gibson humbucking design, he took a different route. Crucially, the new design differed from Seth's Gibson humbucker by using threaded CuNiFe magnetic polepieces, instead of an Alnico bar magnet – and the Fender Wide Range humbucker was born, gracing a trio of Teles in the early 70s (pictured below on the new American Vintage II 1972 Telecaster Thinline; pic 1).

But what exactly is CuNiFe? "It's an alloy of 60 per cent copper, 20 per cent nickel and 20 per cent iron," states Fender's long-standing pickup guru Tim Shaw. "Seth discovered pretty quickly that because there's not a lot of iron in a CuNiFe magnet – a regular Alnico magnet is about half iron – that there wasn't a lot of inductance: the pickup sounded really, really hi-fi and unpleasant. What he ended up doing was making the coil forms bigger and in the process of doing that he could put more wire on them and get the inductance up and make them sound better. That's how the Fender Wide Range came to exist and that's why it is, in fact, a wide range pickup. Those coil forms are bigger and they're further apart and at that point the pickup is picking up a bigger section of the string.

"CuNiFe's big use at the time was in speedometers and tachometers for planes, cars and boats that needed those things," Tim continues. "All was going well. Fender launched the pickups on Tele Deluxes, Customs [and the second version of the Thinline] and then the speedometer and tachometer business went electronic, and at that point nobody needed a CuNiFe magnet any more. So, largely, the material disappears by the end of the 70s." And so did the original Fender Wide Range pickup.

"Fast forward to about 2017," says Tim, "and I asked myself, 'Could we bring this stuff back?' Fender was gracious enough to invest a sizable amount of money. We went all the way down to the ingot stage with this – we actually forged stuff and made rods and magnets – and it took a while. I ended up with a box that I could hold in my hand of *extraordinarily* expensive magnets and was able to bring the Wide Range pickup back. We relaunched those in 2020. We are exclusive with CuNiFe: we have an exclusive with the entire food chain that produces the material, so Fender is the only company that's going to have it.

"I then began to ask myself what else we would be able to do with CuNiFe. We've got these form factors, so we've got to have something that lives well in the Fender family in that these things have to be recognisable-sounding Fender pickups, but they have to bring something else to the party. The question is, what is that going to be?"

Beyond The Wide Range

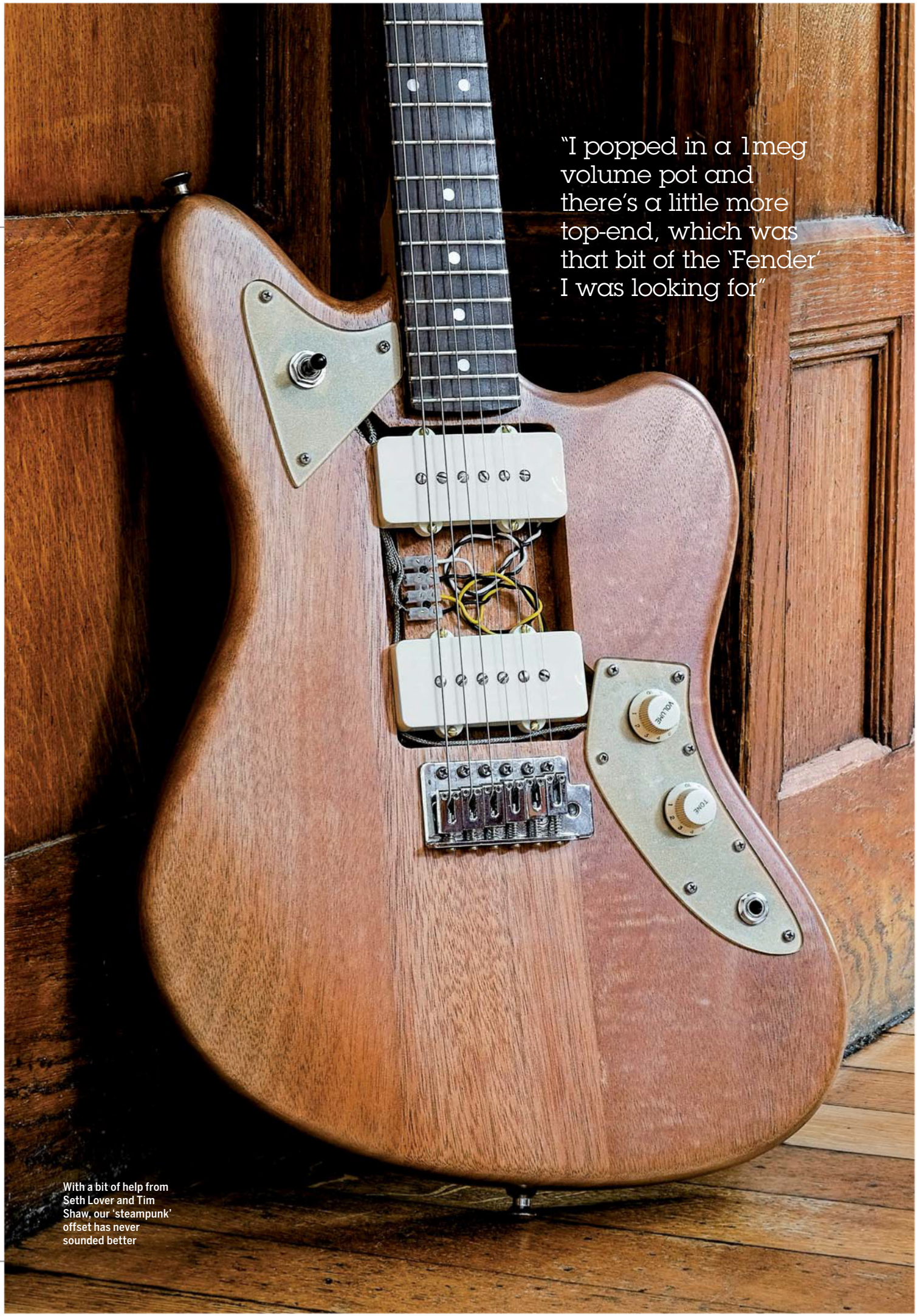
In the first of three product launches, we get to see the fruits of Tim's labour. There are four pickup sets, not surprisingly one each for a Strat and Tele and two for the Jazzmaster. The difference is that these new pickups all feature slot-head magnetic polepieces made of either CuNiFe or another material. "There are a couple of materials that have properties [that enable them to] be made into a screw and also a magnet," says Tim, with Alnico being one and the other something called Iron Chromium Cobalt (its chemical element symbol being FeCrCo). "Now, CuNiFe is a pleasant sounding word," Tim points out. "Alnico has got a strong powerful feel. But Iron Chromium Cobalt – or FeCrCo – on the other hand, not so much. I gave up trying to type it so I ended up, when talking about the material, calling it Cobalt Chrome."

The new Strat set uses only CuNiFe threaded magnets, while the Tele set uses only the Cobalt Chrome threaded magnets (pic 2). "You'll notice we've got a very distinct look on these things," continues Tim. "There's a nickel silver surround and an insert, which in the future might

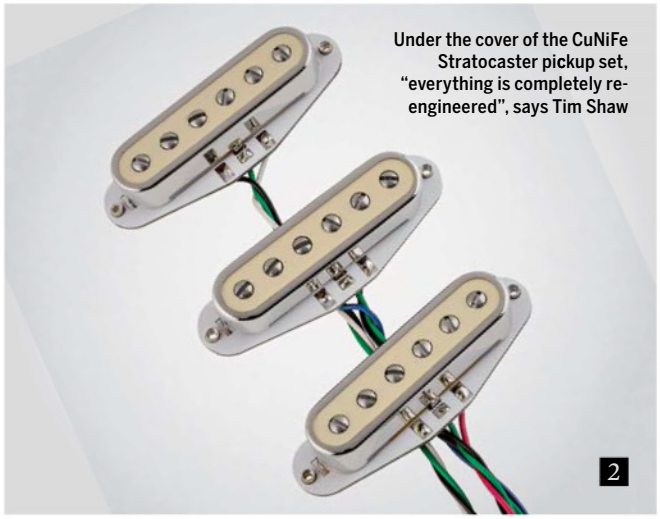
Fender's new American Vintage II 1972 Telecaster Thinline features dual Wide Range humbuckers

"The coil forms [of the Wide Range pickup] are bigger and they're further apart… [so] it picks up a bigger section of the string" ***Tim Shaw***

PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS; PHOTO OPPOSITE BY DAVE BURRLUCK



With a bit of help from Seth Lover and Tim Shaw, our 'steampunk' offset has never sounded better



Under the cover of the CuNiFe Stratocaster pickup set, "everything is completely re-engineered", says Tim Shaw

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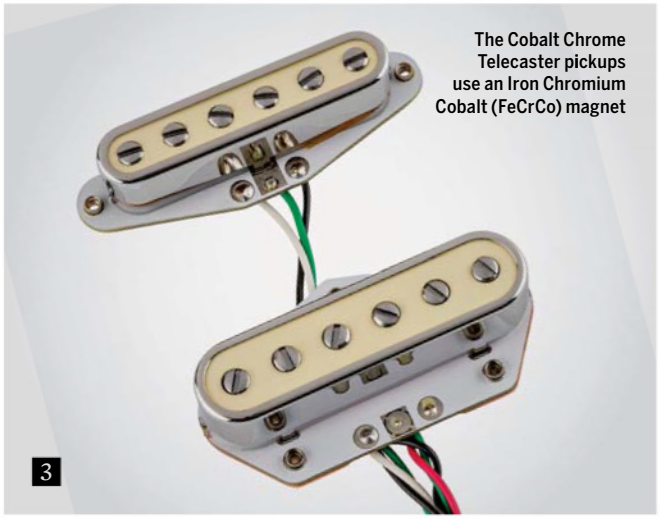

The Cobalt Chrome Telecaster pickups use an Iron Chromium Cobalt (FeCrCo) magnet

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The new Jazzmaster pickups with their slot-head magnetic poles

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With the covers removed, you can see the difference against a standard Jazzmaster pickup (top)

5

or might not be a different colour. The covers are thinner than plastic covers and, because I needed to get more inductance and basically more wire around the pickups, everything inside that cover is completely re-engineered."

The first Jazzmaster set uses Cobalt Chrome for the bridge pickup and CuNiFe for the neck, while the second one – humbuckers with the same offset-polepiece style of the Wide Range (pic3) – uses CuNiFe. And don't forget, the original-style CuNiFe Wide Range humbucker has been available both on a few guitars and aftermarket for a couple of years now.

Testing Time

Like any aftermarket pickup, it's useless without a guitar. You're not going to know what it sounds like until you've bought one, or a set, and installed them. Our recent StewMac Offset kit build – with its revolutionary 'steampunk' screw-in pickup method – was the obvious host, not least that I have already loaded on a fairly generic set of Jazzmaster single coils. So I ordered up the CuNiFe/Cobalt Chrome Jazzmaster set.

With their plastic covers on, they look like any other Jazzmaster set on the outside, but the giveaway is the slot-head threaded magnetic polepieces (pic 4). Remove the covers, however, and they're very different: instead of the usual rectangular fibre formers, these have large-diameter circular ends and are moulded from nylon into which the magnets thread (pic 5). The wire is spec'd as "enamel coated", although the bridge pickup's is a lighter tan in colour; the neck is a darker, deeper brown (pic 6). There doesn't seem to be noticeably more winds on the new set, but because of the high DCRs we'd presume a wire thinner than 42-gauge is used. Under the nylon bobbin is what looks like a piece of rigid plastic, like a PCB board material, then there's a thin copper-plated steel baseplate. Pretty smart.

Now, our offset might have a lightweight mahogany body and a Strat-style vibrato, but, as my tests have so far concluded, it's a big, balanced-sounding instrument with a little of the Jazzmaster's funkier resonance. The screw-in loading means pickup swaps are dead easy: slacken strings, position new pickups, drill mounting holes, add foam cushions, and screw in pickups and wires; tune up, adjust pickup height and go. Loading in the new set was even easier as I'd already mounted a set of Jazzmaster pickups so I didn't need to drill any additional holes (pics 7 & 8).

My circuit is dead simple, too: a three-way toggle switch selector, 500k volume and tone pots (wired modern style) with a .047µf Orange Drop capacitor. Very different from an actual Jazzmaster, of course, but at the pickups' launch Tim Shaw answered a question on whether we should be using 1meg-ohm pots with this new set: "The Jazzmasters are perfectly happy with 500k or 1meg," he says. "There's a little more top-end with the 1meg, but the idea was they had to be able to play with everybody."

Setting pickup height is another key consideration. "These can be set the usual 3mm from the string or a tad closer if you want," Tim tells us, "because the magnets are actually pretty weak."

As a consequence, I set the pickups a little closer, more like a humbucker, approximately 1.6mm on the treble side

PHOTOS BY DAVE BURRLUCK

From the side, you can see pretty similar coils on the CuNiFe/Cobalt bridge pickup (top) and a standard Alnico V Jazzmaster pickup (bottom)

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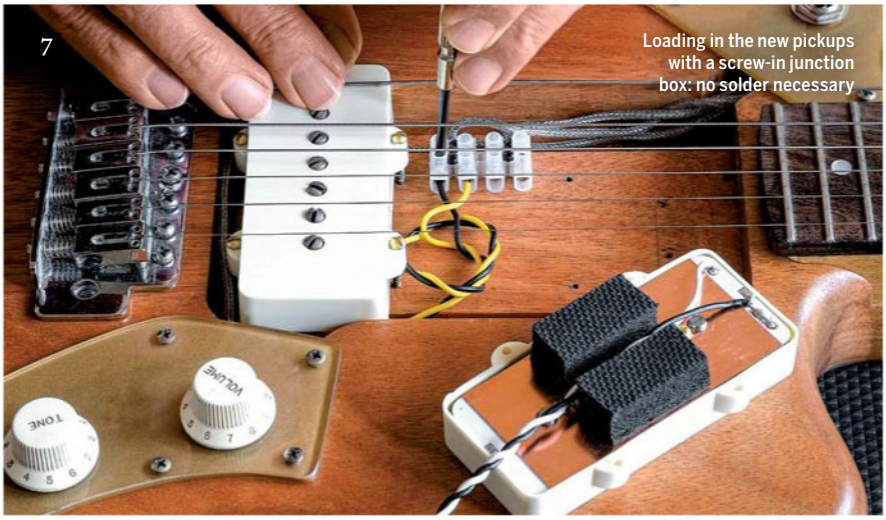

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Loading in the new pickups with a screw-in junction box: no solder necessary

Job done: the new pickups fitted on the guitar in minutes

8

(measured from the top of the cover to the high E fretted at the top fret) and 2.4mm on the bass side. I set both pickups the same distances and the output balance proves perfect. Of course, subtly altering the height of the individual magnets will allow you to fine-tune things further – something you can't do on a standard Jazzmaster pickup with its rod magnets.

Overall, the sounds I'm hearing are fuller, rounder and richer than the previous Jazzmaster set. The neck is like a smooth P-90, almost humbucker-like with some gain; the bridge has plenty of bite, too, and a little honk, but the high-end is smooth and not as gritty or metallic as the previous pickup. But it's the mix that's the standout sound in terms of character: it's more

"The CuNiFe/Cobalt Chrome Jazzmaster set has no sharp edges, but there's no mud, either"

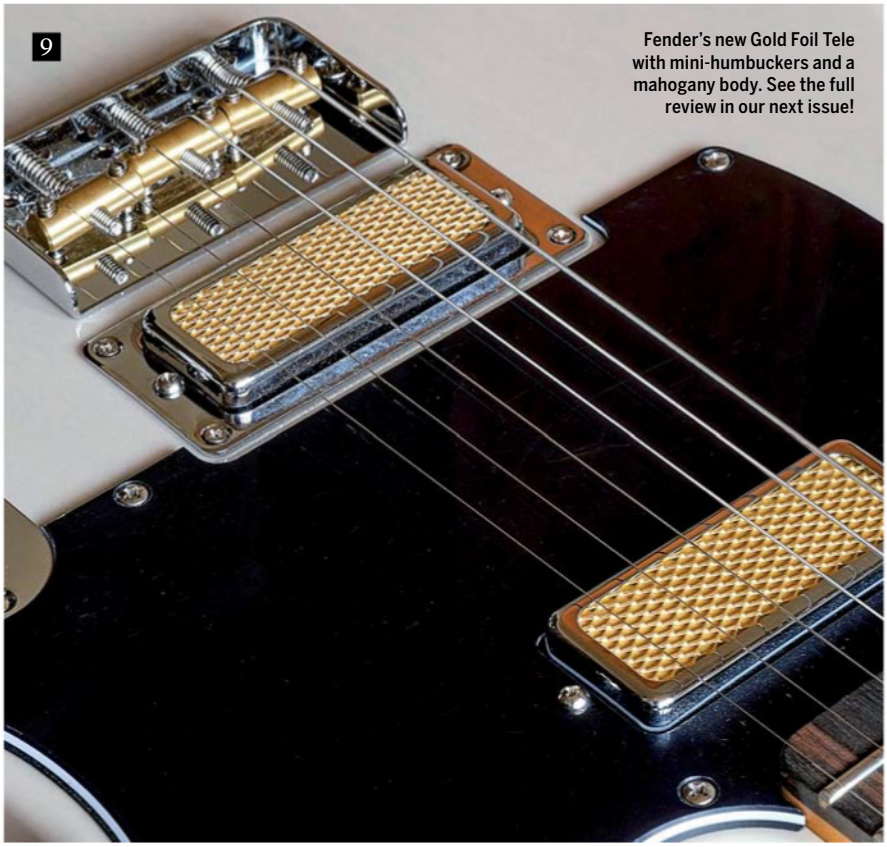
scooped with considerable bouncy clarity. Above all, it's the quality of sound that impresses. I can't get a bad sound here and these sound very versatile, from clear but plummy jazz at the neck, to quite full-bodied alt-rock at the bridge, and jangly and sparkling or beautifully funky in the middle position. There are no sharp edges, but there's no mud, either.

"CuNiFe is not a particularly strong magnet," observes Tim. "It's kinda like Alnico III. And one of the things that means sonically is when you strike the string the rise time of the note is not really quick. The onset transient kinda goes in smoothly, so it's got a really interesting attack that ends up being musically useful. Another thing that the material does is that it always has

a pleasant sparkly top-end and it never gets harsh. If you use a lot of right hand dynamics where you hit hard and then soft, it's very responsive to that – very musical as a material."

It seems the Jazzmaster has been an important guitar for Tim over the years. "The first guy I ever played with, I had a '62 Jazzmaster and a brown Deluxe and I just thought that was the greatest thing ever," he says. "That sound got burned into my brain and has been burning in my brain for 60 years! And the other I've heard is Chris Stapleton's [Jazzmaster] guitar. I had his entire stage rig in my office for over a week and that's a sound that really sticks in my head.

"That neck pickup sound for a Jazzmaster, that full rich musical sound, is a really important one to me and the CuNiFe gave us all of that with a little bit of sparkle on top. The bridge pickup for a Jazzmaster, in most cases, is Alnico V and that can be harsh, a less-than-pleasant fella. So with the Cobalt Chrome in the bridge we've got the Alnico V attack without the really spikey upper midrange that it can have. And like the Tele set, in the middle position, there's a really interesting scoop in the midrange that's pretty musical and pretty useful."



9 Fender's new Gold Foil Tele with mini-humbuckers and a mahogany body. See the full review in our next issue!

PHOTOS BY DAVE BURRLUCK

"CuNiFe is not a particularly strong magnet… it's got a really interesting attack that ends up being musically useful" ***Tim Shaw***

Stage Two

But does our homemade host now sound like a pukka Jazzmaster? Well, that's another can of worms. It could be argued that compared with the Strat and Tele, the Jazzmaster's voice is less distinct – one reason that it's become a favourite for players using pedals to dramatically mangle its voice in some cases. And while I'm enjoying these CuNiFe/Cobalt Chrome versions, it's only that middle pickup position that really shouts 'Fender' and 'Jazzmaster'; the solo pickup positions seem to nod (perhaps a little too far) into the world of arch-rival Gibson. Or is that simply down to the mahogany body of my offset? Another can of worms… and while I'd probably answer in the affirmative, it's a reminder that, to a certain extent, it's never just the sound of the pickup we're hearing. It's the sound of the guitar, too – it's scale length, hardware, wood and construction.

As we've said on many occasions, comparative testing and listening is crucial in evaluating any of our mods, and pickups are no different. Just as I'm at this stage with the newly voiced 'steampunk' offset, a new Fender Gold Foil Telecaster (pic 9), which I'd requested ages ago for our review pages, turns up unannounced. This Tele has a mahogany body, too. The Gold Foil pickups are also apparently mini-humbuckers and when A/B'd with our new CuNiFe/Cobalt Chrome-loaded offset it sounds… well, more like a Fender; there's less depth and more high-end, though slightly smoothed. The advantage of the separate control plate on my offset means I can change the circuit in minutes – unlike a real Jazzmaster with its typically full-face scratchplate. I popped in a 1meg volume pot in minutes and, as Tim said earlier, there's a little more top-end, which was that bit of the 'Fender' I was looking for. It sounds glorious.

Sometimes, even I'm surprised by what you can achieve on your kitchen table… with the help of a set of pickups conceived from Seth Lover's original magnet design and re-engineered by Tim Shaw. Thanks, guys!

FENDER CUNIFE/ COBALT CHROME JAZZMASTER SET

PRICE: £279
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single coil set w/ plastic covers
MOUNTING TYPE: 4x screw direct mount with foam cushions (provided)
POLEPIECE SPACING: Approx 52mm
HOOK-UP WIRE: Vinyl covered ground (black), hot (yellow, bridge; white, neck)
MAGNET TYPE: Threaded CuNiFe (neck); threaded Cobalt Chrome (bridge)
COIL WIRE/WIND: Enamel-coated, gauge not specified, on nylon bobbins
POTTING: Yes
MEASURED DCR (KOHMS): 12.34 (bridge); 9.6 (neck)
INDUCTANCE (HENRIES): 5.9 (neck); 6.7 (bridge)
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: CuNiFe Wide Range humbucker Jazzmaster set (£369), CuNiFe Stratocaster set (£319), Cobalt Chrome Telecaster set (£279), CuNiFe Wide Range humbucker (£205 each)

www.fender.com

That should give you something to think about till our next issue. In the meantime, if you have any modding questions, or suggestions, drop us a line – The Mod Squad.

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Guitarist

Huw Price's
Nitty Gritty

Do you like your amp to punch its full weight, but it's just too loud? This could be the answer

Attenuation

All valve amps have a sweet spot where they're at their most touch-sensitive, notes begin to sustain effortlessly and dynamics start to compress. In an ideal world, our amps would always be dialled into that sweet spot, but that risks incurring the wrath of bandmates, sound engineers and the local constabulary. So, how can we crank our amps but never exceed acceptable volume levels? One solution is to use an attenuator.

Amplifiers generate a lot of electrical energy, but the speakers actually produce the sound by generating sound waves. At the risk of grossly oversimplifying, the more power it's fed, the louder a speaker will sound. Since the object is to reduce volume without compromising our amp settings, attenuation is usually achieved by placing a device between the amplifier output and the speaker in order to reduce the amount of energy reaching the speaker itself.

Variacs and voltage controllers such as the AmpRx BrownBox can be used to achieve overdrive at reduced volume, but valve life may suffer. Power scaling offers a different approach because it maintains heater voltage going to the valves but starves them of plate voltage to achieve the same result without stressing the valves. In contrast, outboard attenuators do not increase distortion and they're designed to have minimal impact on tone. This is achieved by dissipating the energy as heat or mechanical energy. But before we discuss those options, there is a cheap and easy remedy if your cabinet contains multiple speakers.

Speaker Solutions

Many powerful amps are designed to interface with multiple speakers. Multiple speaker cones provide a larger surface area to generate sound waves, so they'll sound louder than a single speaker being driven by the same amp with identical settings. If in doubt, try running a four-watt Fender Champ through a 4x12 cabinet and prepare to be amazed...

Since the aim is to reduce volume, we can achieve this by disengaging one or more speakers. The amp will still need to 'think' the speaker is in circuit to maintain the correct impedance, so the trick is to replace the speaker with a resistor of the same value. Building a switchable speaker defeat box with an onboard resistor is a simple way to turn a 2x12 cabinet into a 1x12, or a 4x10 cabinet into a 3x10 or 2x10. It's possible to achieve a significant drop in volume with little discernible change in tone. Make sure the resistor's power rating is equal to or greater than the speaker's, and if you're switching out a speaker, use a resistor of the same value.

> While disengaging a speaker or two is effective at reducing volume, passive attenuators offer finer degrees of control

L-Padding

While speaker switching is effective, it is fairly crude, so passive attenuators offer finer degrees of control. They don't require an external power source and most operate using a rotary switch offering several preset stages of attenuation. Most are connected between the amplifier output and speaker, but some boutique amps have them as onboard features.

Passive attenuators of this type usually work on the L-Pad principle. This combines a couple of resistors with the speaker load. Let's assume the amp is designed to power an eight-ohm speaker. If an eight-ohm resistor is connected across the speaker connections, the amp sees a four-ohm load. But if another four-ohm resistor is connected in series on the positive side, the load resistance is restored to eight ohms. The amp is perfectly happy, but now the power it's generating is shared between the speaker and the two resistors. Consequently, the speaker only gets some of the power and the resistors turn the remainder into heat.

Resistors of different values can be combined with the speaker to achieve specific degrees of attenuation – all the while maintaining the same load impedance for the amp. L-Pad resistor tables can be found online and building an L-Pad attenuator using a rotary switch and a handful of high-power wire wound resistors is a fairly easy DIY project and an elegant solution to the problem.

A switchable speaker defeat box can help you reduce volume with little effect on tone by turning a 2x12 cab, for example, into a 1x12

Universal Audio's Ox and Two Notes' Torpedo series (below) are examples of attenuators that include both load box and cabinet simulator technology

Power Revolution

In practice, stepped L-Pad attenuators always seem to be slightly too loud or slightly too quiet. But there is an alternative that's even easier to assemble if you use a rotary L-Pad. These look much like a very large potentiometer with three solder tags, and all you need is a couple of jack sockets, some hook-up wire and an enclosure to house all the parts.

Inside the L-Pad itself there are two wire wound resistor tracks that maintain a consistent load impedance but offer infinitely variable level control. They are available in four-, eight- and 16-ohm versions, so if your amp is configured for an eight-ohm load, buy an eight-ohm L-Pad.

Also consider the power rating because it would be dangerous to use a 15-watt L-Pad with a 50-watt amplifier. To prevent burning it out, use an L-Pad with a power handling that exceeds that of your amp. The initial outlay may be higher, but it's better to be safe than sorry.

Load Down

At this stage, it may be helpful to differentiate between attenuators and load boxes. Load boxes are generally used to completely silence an amplifier and provide a line level signal that can be used for recording or sent into a PA. In the raw, this line level output can sound pretty poor because the amp sees a purely resistive and constant load, rather than the ever-shifting reactive load of conventional speakers.

The interaction of the amplifier's output stage and a speaker impedance that actually varies across the frequency range is very complex and it contributes greatly to the frequency response and dynamics. In short, simple load boxes sound and feel 'wrong', and to be of practical use they must employ some sort of speaker simulation.

There are plenty to choose from, with passive devices featuring filter networks at the lower end and highly sophisticated digital cabinet simulations at the top end. The Two Notes Torpedo range (which you'll now find integrated into some amps on the market, such as the Ashdown MF484 2.N head, Laney's Supergroup LA-Studio Laney and Victory's V4 The Jack) and Universal Audio's Ox (which also features a stepped attenuator) are popular examples of modern attenuators with load box and cabinet simulator technology.

Reaction Times

L-Pad attenuators retain some degree of reactance because a speaker remains in circuit, but the system is less reactive than a direct speaker connection. This is why some players feel that L-Pad attenuators have their shortcomings.

Weber Speakers' MASS design is an attempt to create an attenuator with a reactive load. The box contains a coneless speaker frame with a voice coil that moves as it would in a regular speaker and converts electrical energy into mechanical energy.

Boss's multi-function reactive load box/cabinet emulator is another option for cranking up your favourite 100-watt head on a quiet stage

Because there's no cone, it's effectively a 'silent' speaker. The downside is that energy is converted less efficiently and the dummy speaker dissipates much of the energy as heat – just like a resistor. Having no cone also makes the reactance of dummy and conventional speakers slightly different.

Inductors and stepped transformers can also be used to provide reactive attenuation. Tone King's Ironman is well regarded, but there have been reports of amplifier damage with some transformer attenuators. Others use lightbulbs and electric fans to dissipate energy – often in conjunction with resistive loads. The amp signal illuminates the bulb or moves the fan, so these devices do not require external power.

Reactance amplifiers such as the Bad Cat Unleash and Fryette Power Station offer a very interesting alternative. Both present the guitar amp with reactive load, and a small portion of that amp signal is fed to an onboard amplifier that can be set to the desired volume level. The Bad Cat is solid-state, but the Fryette is actually valve. In addition to lowering level, both can output 50 to 100 watts. So not only does this tame your stack, these devices allow you to take a Champ, Pro Junior or any other low-wattage amplifier to a gig and bump up the volume significantly.

Tone King's Ironman II provides reactive attenuation, both as a standalone unit and onboard amps such as this Imperial MK II

Tones Of Contention

Some argue that attenuators adversely effect tone, but much depends on expectations and the amount of attenuation being applied. As a rule, small amounts of attenuation have a less audible effect than larger amounts. Lowering a 100-watt stack to around 50 watts will sound better than trying to tame it to acoustic-guitar levels. If you're doing a small pub or club gig, or jamming at home, however, then attenuating an amp between 10 and 20 watts will produce better results.

All guitar speakers distort and compress to some extent when they're pushed hard, and that's part of the tone equation. Since attenuators allow less power to reach the speakers, they cannot contribute in quite the same way – and the tone is inevitably different. But it's arguably less so than using a master volume. Also consider how your perception of bass and treble response changes at different volume levels. This is why some attenuators feature switches that shape the bass and treble, but there's nothing to stop you using your amp's tone controls to compensate for any perceived changes instead.

Some argue that attenuators adversely effect tone, but much depends on the amount of attenuation applied

Attenuators have been linked to amplifier failures. In some cases this may be true, but remember that using an attenuator allows us to play an amp flat out for extended periods of time. Habitually pushing an amp hard will inevitably shorten valve life, but that's more of a wear-and-tear issue than poor reliability. If it means you have to buy a new set of power valves after enjoying a few years of inspiring tone, rather than a decade of indifferent tone, you may decide that's a price worth paying. And if you fancy having a go at building your own, check out Huw's DIY attenuator tutorial at https://bit.ly/git500nittygritty G

www.huwpriceguitar.com

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Better By Design

While it's clear that cabinet design can affect an amp's sound, how much change is done by design, asks Zilla Cabs' Paul Gough – and to what end?

As a cabinet maker, I'm often approached by amp companies to produce their shells. Some just want a specific look, which often greatly narrows the scope for build or construction methods. Now, this isn't necessarily a bad thing, especially if the cabinet design is integral to how the amp sounds (as with the case of Fender's Tweed amps, which we'll look at later on). But this is mostly the case for copies of existing amps. The really interesting work comes from amp designers who want to use cabinet design to emphasise their amps' qualities and play around with how different design aspects will work with their own ideas of how the amp should sound.

For the amp makers who want to recreate old designs, most of the work (on the cabinet side of things) is really just to make sure the cab is built to a similar spec as the original, maybe with a few tweaks here and there. While it can sometimes feel like guesswork trying to figure out why some amp makers made their cabinets in the way they did, there are often clues left behind. No names mentioned, but one well-known combo has a cabinet that fits near perfectly with its baffle on half an 8x4ft sheet of plywood. It also has on-body piping spaced such that it is extremely efficient when cutting its Tolex (the vinyl amp covering) off the roll. That said, it is a great-sounding amp that is a key component of several iconic players' rigs, so maybe the efficiency on materials was just luck.

Onto Fender Tweed amps. This amp has a cabinet design that utilises a floating baffle (a speaker baffle that's fixed relatively freely on two sides, rather than the usual four), which is integral to its sound. In fact, when rehoused in a head and open-back cab setup, most of those amps sound very different – to the point, I would probably say, that other than the amp circuitry itself, the cabinet has more of a tonal impact than the speaker and size of materials. It's clear that on a modern reproduction, keeping the original design is a must, but sometimes it's hard to know exactly why it was originally made this way. It surely can't be that it saved time in construction.

Although some people say cabinet material and thickness make no difference to a cab's performance (a view that is sadly gaining traction from YouTube videos), it does have a noticeable effect. The construction material of choice on early Fenders was pine, an often rather resonant wood with quite a different low-end response from birch ply and one that was in plentiful supply in the United States where Fenders were made. We have to remember that back in the 50s and 60s there were serious restrictions on availability of materials, as well as often punitive import taxes, which resulted in builders sourcing locally. This gave rise to tonal characteristics common to a place or region and loosely explains why American cabinets would often be made from pine, whereas European amps were often made from birch ply.

Bringing things forward a little and although Mesa/Boogie clearly took some influence from early Fender cabinet design, for me, the company clearly designed its cabinets with a purpose. Its early Mark series amps have a Fender-esque appearance in a lot of ways but use other (often more expensive) materials, rather than pine, which is a big sign they were used for a reason. Rigidity has always been a key feature in Mesa's combos, helping to give a more focused sound, and though the smaller size of its early combos did give a certain vibe, the more modern, larger combos kept this rigidity, increasing weight but maximising their focus, something that Mesa is known for in its head and cab units.

> "Cabinet material and thickness have a noticeable effect on a cab's performance"

To round things up, practical factors of the 50s and 60s would shape how amp builders approached their combo designs, and unless we're now trying to recreate those early sounds (which many of us are), we should consider lots of materials and construction methods to get the best from an amp, rather than placing restrictions on design purely to give a certain look.

Paul modded this JC-40 combo for Two Door Cinema Club, making the baffle more rigid and changing the case to birch ply, rather than particle board

PHOTO COURTESY OF ZILLACABS

The floating baffle design of Fender's Tweed amps plays an important role in their iconic sound

"Other than the circuitry, the Tweed's cabinet has more of a tonal impact than the speaker and size of materials"

Rod Brakes' Classic Gear

Back by popular demand, the 'black beauty' returns ready to rock

Late-60s Gibson Les Paul Custom

Gibson's debut solidbody guitar line was introduced in 1952 with the Les Paul Model (dubbed the 'Goldtop' on account of its gold finish). The range was expanded in 1954 with the Les Paul TV and Junior student guitars along with the price-list-topping Ebony finish Les Paul Custom. The mid-priced Les Paul Special was added the following year. At this stage, Les Paul Customs featured an Alnico V pickup in the neck position paired with a P-90 in the bridge position, while all other Les Paul guitars were fitted with P-90s only. From 1957, Customs were fitted with a trio of PAF humbuckers (rarely two), while the Goldtop received a dual set. The next year, the Les Paul Model was renamed the Les Paul Standard and decked out in its now iconic Cherry Sunburst finish. But the Standard would only be in production from 1958 to 1960 when it was radically overhauled into the SG-style double-cutaway design. Customs followed suit in 1961, appearing in a white finish yet retaining their triple-humbucker configuration.

The demise of the single-cutaway Les Pauls in the early 60s was attributed to poor sales. Furthermore, from the late 50s Gibson placed great emphasis on electric guitar designs that improved access to the upper frets, as evidenced by its modernised 1958 unveilings that included the ES-335, EB-2, Explorer, Flying V and double-cutaway TV and Junior Les Pauls. Advertised as a "new, revolutionary body design", the "fretless wonder" Les Paul Custom was renamed the SG Custom in 1963. SG (solid guitar) models generally sold well. But at the same time, a demand for the old-style Les Pauls was growing. Seen in the hands of guitar heroes from the mid-60s onwards, single-cutaway models were increasingly sought out by players and Gibson took note.

In 1968, Gibson reintroduced the single-cutaway Les Paul design in two guises: the Les Paul Standard and Les Paul Custom. With its gold finish and P-90 pickups, this Les Paul Standard differed considerably from its 'Burst namesake model that was in production from 1958 to 1960 and was supplanted by the mini-humbucker-loaded Les Paul Deluxe in 1969. The Deluxe became a classic in its own right during the hard-rock era of the 70s but was discontinued in the mid-80s. Additionally in '69, with Les Paul himself now back onboard,

> Gibson shipped more Les Paul Custom models in 1969 alone than it did throughout the entire 50s

Gibson expanded the single-cutaway line to include the short-lived Professional and Personal guitars (superseded by the Recording model in 1971). However, the most successful of all was the Custom. In fact, Gibson shipped more in '69 alone than it did throughout the entire 50s.

Though Gibson touted the late-60s Les Paul Custom as an "exact duplicate of the original", it differs significantly from the 50s guitars. The most obvious difference is that it came fitted with two humbuckers as standard. But less apparent is that underneath its Ebony finish lies a maple cap (earlier variants were constructed of mahogany only). Another important distinction is the headstock angle, which by this stage had been decreased from 17 to 14 degrees. Unique in construction, late-60s Les Pauls are coveted by collectors and are now commanding five-figure sums on the vintage market. G

4

Gold-plated hardware features throughout, including the Tune-o-matic bridge, tailpiece, pickup covers and tuners

The Evolution of the Late-60s Les Paul Custom

1952
Les Paul Model released; single-cutaway body; 2x P-90 pickups; gold finish

Late 1953
Les Paul Custom prototypes

1954
Les Paul Custom released; single-cutaway; 1-piece mahogany body; Alnico V (neck) and P-90 (bridge) pickups; black finish

1957
3x humbuckers

1961
Double-cutaway SG-style mahogany body; 3x humbuckers; white finish

1968
Single-cutaway; 1-piece mahogany body with maple top; 1-piece mahogany neck; 2x humbuckers; black finish

1969
3-piece mahogany neck; shorter neck tenon

Late 1969/Early 1970 (Norlin era)
Laminated 'pancake' body with maple top; neck volute

1972
Les Paul Custom '54; Alnico V (neck) & P-90 (bridge) pickups; black finish

1974
'Twentieth anniversary' 15th fret inlay

1969 Gibson Les Paul Custom

1. SERIAL NUMBER
Six digits located on upper headstock rear

2. HEADSTOCK
Mother-of-pearl Gibson logo and five-piece split-diamond inlays; five-ply (b/w) binding; Ebony finish

3. PLASTICS
Two black pickup surrounds; multiple-ply (b/w) bevelled-edge pickguard; four black 'witch hat' knobs (two 'vol' and two 'tone') with gold labels; white switch tip; black switch ring (labelled 'rhythm' and 'treble'); two-ply (b/w) 'bell' truss rod cover (labelled 'Les Paul Custom'); black control cavity cover

4. HARDWARE
Gold-plated: two pickup covers, six 'waffle' tuners with metal buttons, Tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece; metal strap buttons

5. PICKUPS & ELECTRONICS
Dual humbuckers; four pots (two volume, two tone); two tone capacitors; three-way selector switch; side-mounted jack

6. BODY
Single-piece mahogany; arched maple top; single-cutaway; seven-ply top binding; five-ply back binding; Ebony finish

7. NECK
Single-piece mahogany; long tenon; 24 ¾-inch scale length; 16th-fret body join; bound ebony fretboard with large mother-of-pearl block inlays; 22 low frets; Ebony finish

***Guitarist* would like to thank Seven Decades for showing us this incredible example**

GUITAR PHOTO BY JOSEPH BRANSTON

David Davidson's Vintage Icons

David shares some rare Teles and explains why "1959 was a bad year for neck dates"

Fender Telecaster Customs

A super-rare 1967 Fender Telecaster Custom in Fiesta Red

"In my guitar youth, I was surprised one day at We Buy Guitars when someone brought in a Custom Telecaster. At the time, I didn't know there was such a thing. But then I'd never looked through old catalogues – I just knew the guitars I'd handled. I was young, you know. But when I got this Custom Tele in the store, I couldn't put it down. It was very worn and it had this great vibe. It was [the standard finish] sunburst, and it had a big armwear spot on the front and a belt-buckle rash on the back that was the size of a softball. It was very smoky and had been played in lots of bars and roadhouses. I think I paid $1,000 for it. But that was the beginning of something that intrigued me. At first, I thought there was just the Custom Telecaster, and then I later found out there was also a Custom Esquire. That made me realise there's just so much I don't know – and I still feel that way!

"When I became interested in Customs, I realised they weren't just 60s guitars, as I had originally thought; [Fender] actually started making them in 1959. I went on a deep dive and have since owned many of them. I went on a kick where I was buying a lot of early '59 guitars. The first ones I've seen that say 'Custom Telecaster' on the headstock are no earlier than April of 1959. But I have seen two that just have a regular Telecaster decal with earlier body dates: one was February '59 and the other was March '59. They didn't have neck dates at that time.

"1959 was a bad year for neck dates. The folklore is there were some people at the factory who were writing things on the necks that others might find offensive! So it was decided they weren't going to have anything on the heel for a period of time. That's not to say 1959 guitars are always missing neck dates because they certainly do have them – especially early '59s. In January, February they start to fade away. And they seem to be pretty much gone by April. But on Custom Telecasters we usually use body dates located in the bridge pickup cavity, sometimes written on a piece of tape. More rarely it's written in the neck pickup cavity.

"'59 is a really cool year because there's some experimentation going on, including with the finish. The three-tone sunburst sometimes has a wide cherry band and I think it was to do with a particular painter. That's probably the only reason you sometimes see a difference. Like all Fender guitars, Customs keep their slab rosewood fingerboards until mid-'62, then you start to see curved [rosewood veneer] 'boards. Interestingly, they made more Custom Telecasters during '62, '63 and '64 than they made regular Telecasters with rosewood 'boards. [Fender] was thinking of phasing out the standard Telecasters with rosewood, so there are very few '63 and '64 rosewood-'board Telecasters compared with Custom Telecasters. There are no production numbers; I'm basing this on the people I've spoken to over the years and the number of guitars I've seen. I could probably count the number of '63/early '64 rosewood-'board standard Telecasters I've seen on my hands. They just don't come around. It's like 1967 Stratocasters; they're very rare.

> "'59 is a really cool year because there's some experimentation going on with the finish"

"Although maple-'board Custom Teles were available to order in the latter part of the 60s, the rosewood 'board really went well with the body binding, which they added to look more like Gibson guitars. There was always competition between the two – 'they just did this, so we'd better do that' kind of thing. The closest Teles ever got to going full Gibson was in '63 when they made a handful of mahogany body Telecasters with a cherry red finish. At the same time, Gibson was trying to compete against the Stratocaster with the Firebird. And we all know how that worked out!

"I've had Custom Teles in an incredible assortment of colours – even early colours that you don't see often like Foam Green and Sonic Blue. But the vast majority from the early days are sunburst with the odd Black and [Olympic] White guitar. Sometimes the White ones have 'tuxedo' black binding, otherwise it's just the regular white binding. Custom colours on Custom Telecasters are more common after 1965 – mainly Candy Apple Red, Lake Placid Blue and Olympic White. But we also have Fiesta Red, Ocean Turquoise and Firemist Gold ones. I recently sold one of the coolest Custom Teles I've seen – a '64 with a blonde finish, white binding, and a super-rare [1 ¾-inch] C-size neck stamped 'MAY64C'. Of course, now I wish I never sold it!" **[RB]**

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
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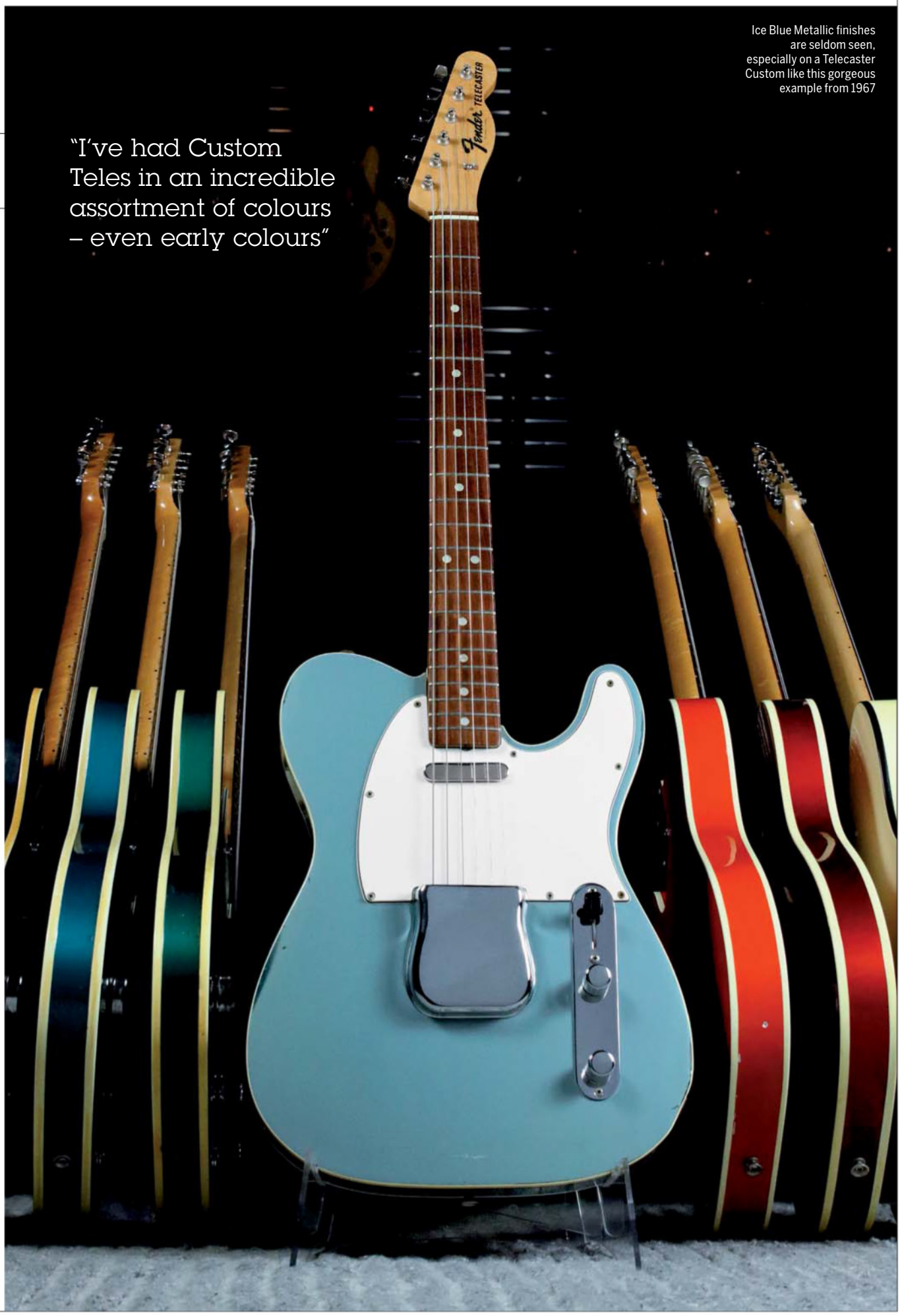
001 (516) 221-0563



Ice Blue Metallic finishes are seldom seen, especially on a Telecaster Custom like this gorgeous example from 1967

"I've had Custom Teles in an incredible assortment of colours – even early colours"

PHOTOS BY PAIGE DAVIDSON

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks

Gary Moore

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Gear used Knaggs SSC, Keeley Boss SD-1 & Vox AC15 C1
Difficulty ★★★★★ | 20 mins per example

MORE THAN A DECADE after his untimely passing, Gary's fiery, emotive playing remains a benchmark for guitar players of all stripes. At various points in his career, Gary experimented successfully with heavy rock, jazz fusion, Celtic rock and ultimately blues – which had been his first love all along. The example solo here is inspired by Gary's playing around the time of his *Still Got The Blues* album (released in 1990), which represented quite a change in direction at this point, though a quick spin demonstrates that Gary had retained all the power and force in his playing.

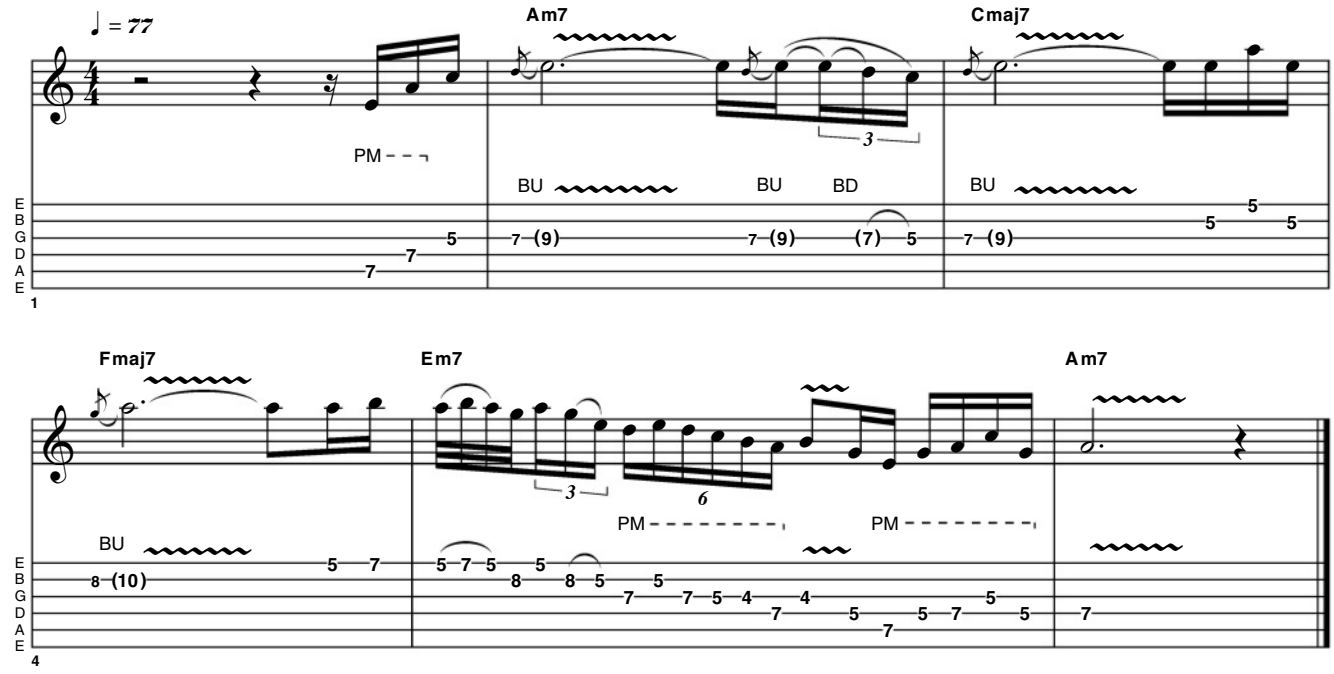
To be more specific about the technical details, Gary was less concerned with the fast alternate-picked triplets and sextuplets so prevalent in his rock and fusion days – and this appears to have been a conscious decision, mentioned by him in at least one interview around this period. However, there was still plenty of flashy playing, with Gary often brushing the pick in one direction across two or three strings in a pentatonic pattern, giving startlingly fast and fluid runs among the more bluesy phrases, which had long been a part of his style.

Another thing that sets Gary's playing apart is his precise use of string bends. This would often be highlighted by an absence of vibrato, or by introducing it gradually as the note sustained. Gary was a master of controlling a very overdriven sound and avoiding unwanted feedback by lightning fast manipulation of the guitar's volume controls; check out some footage of him playing live and you'll see that it's pretty much a reflex whenever he stops playing. It's worth noting that he did also use the controls for dynamic/drive variation, too – just listen to the difference between the main theme and final solo section in *Still Got The Blues*. Hope you enjoy this and see you next time. G

Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now from ***www.richardbarrettguitar.com***

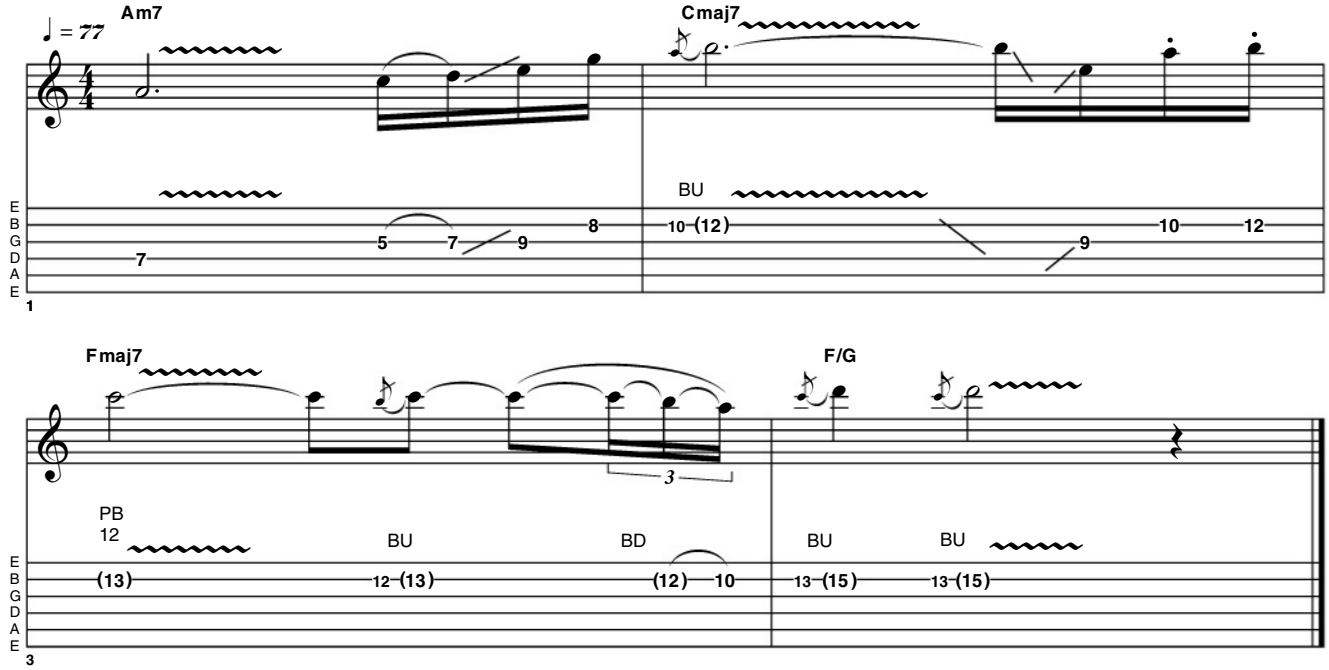
Example 1

THE A MINOR PENTATONIC SHAPE 1 is pretty easy to identify here, though notice that the very first grouping of notes has more in common with an A minor arpeggio. Note the slightly delayed vibrato – and slightly different vibrato employed at beat one of bars 1 and 2. Bar 4 employs some selective palm muting, which thickens the tone and adds some percussive definition to the final phrase. The final note here is also the first note of Example 2, so it's serving a dual purpose.



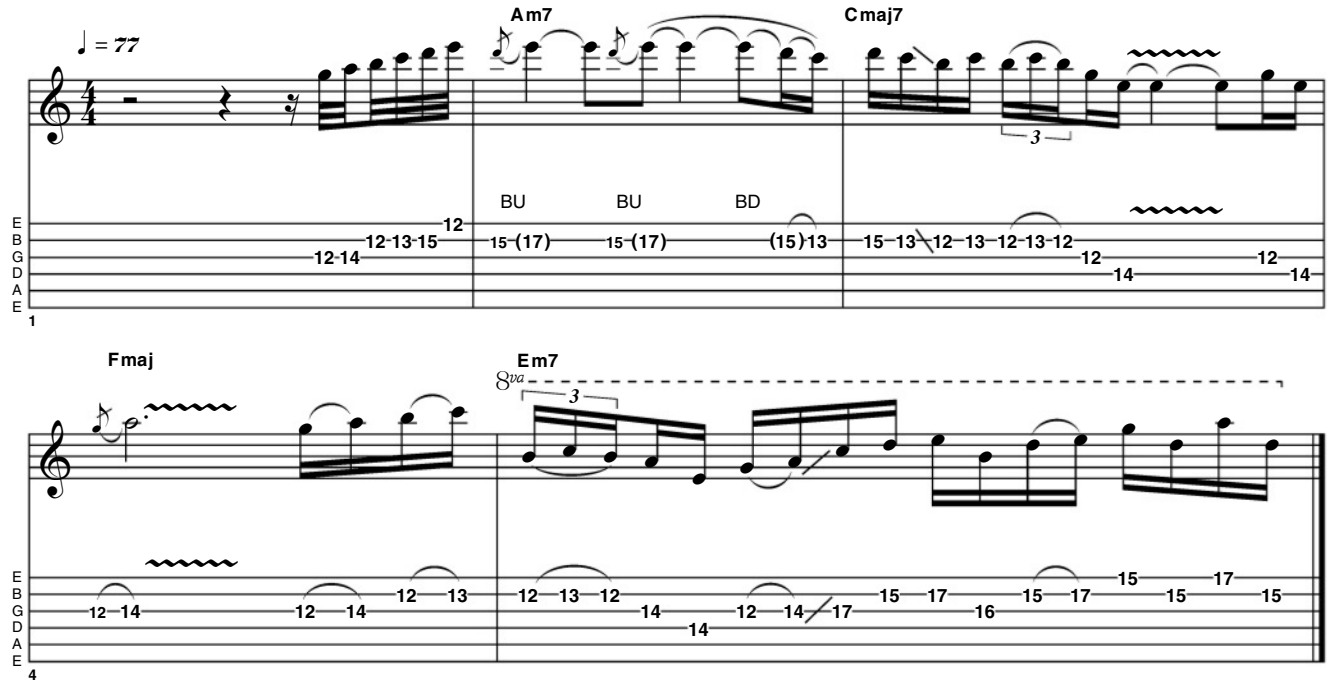
Example 2

THE SUSTAINED A now forms the first part of an ascending phrase, picking up on the major 7th (B) of the underlying Cmaj7, before sliding down and back again to lead into the Fmaj7 with a staccato fragment of the A minor scale. Bar 3 begins with a semitone pre-bend up to C, featuring 'down and back' vibrato – namely, not going above and below the pitch as elsewhere. Perhaps a little Peter Green influence here. Note the characteristic string noise on the subsequent string bends, too.



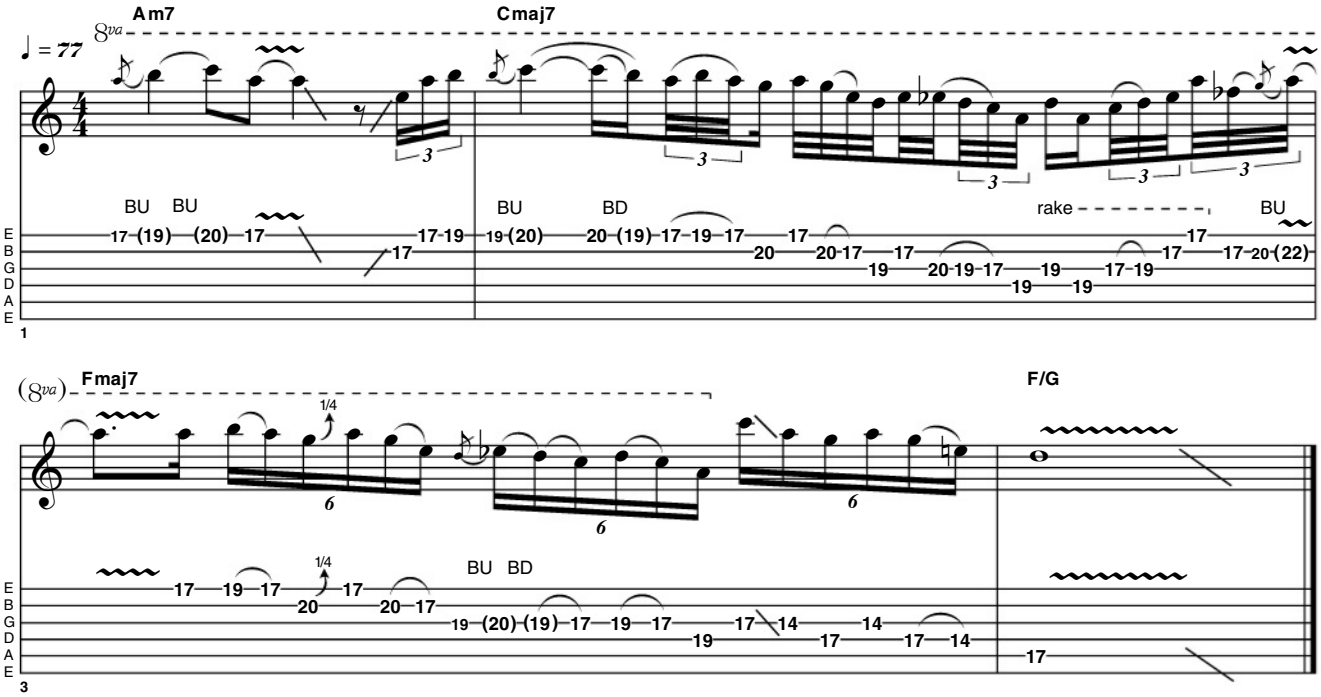
Example 3

HEADING INTO THE SECOND ROUND of the chord progression, there is a switch to the neck pickup and the one and only passage of alternate picking, which is all about landing on that first sustained E in bar 1. The lack of vibrato here is very deliberate and puts the pressure on to get the pitching as accurate as possible on those bends. After a melodic interlude over the Cmaj7 and Fmaj7, the ascent begins towards the high bend at the start of Example 4, so if the end of this phrase seems to cut off abruptly, that's why.



Example 4

ARRIVING AT A BEND TO A HIGH B, giving us a minor 9th over the A minor, this is then pushed still further to a high C, while changing back to the bridge pickup. No particular reason… but it all adds variety! The next pentatonic flurry features a rake across the four highest strings, with a hammer-on along the way. Gary was a master of this type of 'economy picking', which has a distinctly different sound to alternate picking. A descending triplet phrase brings us back down from this peak, with a dramatic slide down the strings to finish.



Hear It Here

GARY MOORE
STILL GOT THE BLUES

While it's unlikely this album will have escaped your notice, it's always worth revisiting. Gary's exquisite phrasing on the title track aside, check out his solos on *Oh Pretty Woman* (alongside Albert King) and the pentatonic flurries in *Walking By Myself*. Gary really gets into character on *Midnight Blues*, far more the blues player (kind of a cross between Peter Green and Albert King) and less of the rock flamboyance – but his phrasing remains as fluent and impressive as ever.

GARY MOORE
BACK ON THE STREETS

From the tail end of Gary's late-70s 'fusion' period, this album visits a more punky vibe with *Fanatical Fascists* and a fantastic take on Thin Lizzy's *Don't Believe A Word*. This and Gary's original solo on Lizzy's *Still In Love With You* were an influence on the example solo. The album finishes with ultimate anthem *Parisienne Walkways* – in a surprisingly restrained arrangement compared with incendiary live performances. Outtakes *Road Of Pain* and *Track Ten* are both suitably epic, too.

THIN LIZZY
BLACK ROSE

Recorded around the same time as *Back On the Streets*, Thin Lizzy's *Black Rose* sees Gary making the move back to rock for now, but the blues influence definitely remains as you can hear in the understated opening moments of *Got To Give It Up*. If you want to hear Gary at his rawest, check out the solo in *Toughest Street In Town* or have a listen to the closing title track for an impressive display of both taste and dexterity on some traditional Celtic melodies.

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